



Church of Saint Cecilia

2357 Bayless Place • Saint Paul, MN 55114
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Weekly Masses:
Saturday 4:30 & Sunday 9:30
Sacrament of Reconciliation: Saturday 3:45



"The Workers in the Vineyard" by Kazakhstan Artist Nelly Bube

WELCOME

To join the parish, please
call
the office at 651.644.4502

PARISH OFFICE HOURS

Monday-Thursday
10:00am to 2:00pm

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Matthew Tande & Mary Ellen Ryan

The Church of Saint Cecilia

From “Impacting Forgiveness” (condensed version)

By: Debie Thomas

On the website JourneywithJesus - September 13, 2016

Forgiveness is not synonymous with healing or reconciliation. Healing has its own timetable, and sometimes reconciliation isn’t possible. Sometimes our lives depend on us severing ties with our offenders, even after we’ve forgiven them. In this sense, forgiveness is not an end; it’s a beginning. An orientation. A leaning into the future. Where it will lead is not pre-ordained.

For this reason, I worry that romanticizing forgiveness obscures its communal, multi-layered power. This is always true, but it is especially true when we’re talking about marginalized communities. In (white) Christian America, it’s too easy to think of forgiveness as a culminating act, as a redemptive, “happily every after” ending to the story of race-based violence.

But when, for example, victims of racial hatred forgive their racist oppressors, they’re not ending anything; they’re preparing their hearts to begin. To resist. To approach the battlefield one more wearisome time. Forgiveness enables the oppressed not only to survive, but to lay down the cumbersome weight of hatred and bitterness, and gear up for the fight. Forgiveness is the *beginning* of the hard work of building God’s kingdom—not the end.

And finally, forgiveness is not quick and easy. Not for us humans. Not if we’re honest. Forgiveness is a process—a messy, non-linear, and often barbed process that can leave us feeling whole and liberated one minute, and bleeding out of every vein the next. In my experience, no one who glibly says the words “I forgive you” gets a pass from this messy process, and no one who struggles extra hard to forgive for reasons of temperament, circumstance, history, or trauma should feel that they’re less spiritual than those who don’t.

Of course, yes, there are times when forgiveness happens dramatically and instantly. But most of the time, there is no cathartic, “altar call” moment when the hurts of the past simply slip off our backs and roll away. There is only the daily business of forgiveness as a slow, sustained way of life. A practice enacted one layered, complicated, and unsentimental moment at a time.

Okay. If forgiveness is not denial, or a shortcut, or a reconciliation, or an easy process, then what is it? What exactly is Jesus asking of us when he tells us to forgive each other again and again and again and again?

In her popular memoir, *Traveling Mercies*, Anne Lamott writes that withholding forgiveness is like drinking rat poison and then waiting for the rat to die. Nora Gallagher writes, “Forgiveness is a way to unburden oneself from the constant pressure of rewriting the past.” Henri Nouwen writes, “Forgiveness is the name of love practiced among people who love poorly. The hard truth is that all people love poorly, and so we need to forgive and be forgiven every day, every hour increasingly. Forgiveness is the great work of love among the fellowship of the weak that is the human family.”

If these writers are correct, then I think forgiveness is choosing to foreground love instead of resentment. If I’m consumed with my own pain, if I’ve made injury my identity, if I insist on weaponizing my well-deserved anger in every interaction I have with people who hurt me, then I’m drinking poison, and the poison will kill me long before it does anything to my abusers. To choose forgiveness is to release myself from the tyranny of my bitterness. To trust that my frenzied longing for vindication and justice is known to God. To cast my hunger for healing deep into Christ’s heart, because healing belongs to him, and he’s the only one powerful enough to secure it.

I wonder if we’re often squeamish about forgiveness because we misunderstand the nature of unconditional love. Foregrounding God’s all-embracing love doesn’t for one second require us to relativize evil. If it did, God’s love would be cruel and weak, not compassionate and strong. But where we humans make love and judgment mutually exclusive—where we cry out for revenge, retribution, and punishment—God holds out for *restorative* justice. A kind of justice we can barely imagine. A kind of justice that has the power to heal *both* the oppressed and the oppressor.

Secondly, I think forgiveness is a transformed way of seeing. A way of seeing that is forward-focused. Future-focused. Eschaton-focused. Again, I don’t believe that abuse and oppression are *ever* God’s will or plan for anyone. But I do believe that God is always and everywhere in the business of taking the worst things that happen to us, and going to work on them for the purposes of multiplying wholeness and blessing. Because God is in the story, we can rest assured that our wounds will not end in loss, trauma, brokenness, and defeat. There will be another turn, another chapter, another path, another grace. Because God loves us, we don’t have to forgive out of scarcity. We can forgive out of God’s abundance.

Lutheran minister Nadia Bolz-Weber, after describing mistreatment as a chain that binds us, writes stunningly about the power of forgiveness to free us for the work of justice and transformation. I want to share her words in conclusion, because they speak so powerfully to me:

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"Maybe retaliation or holding onto anger about the harm done to me doesn't actually combat evil. Maybe it feeds it. Because in the end, if we're not careful, we can actually absorb the worst of our enemy, and at some level, start to become them. So what if forgiveness, rather than being a pansy way to say, 'It's okay,' is actually a way of wielding bolt-cutters, and snapping the chains that link us? What if it's saying, 'What you did was so not okay, I refuse to be connected to it anymore.'? Forgiveness is about being a freedom fighter. And free people are dangerous people. Free people aren't controlled by the past. Free people laugh more than others. Free people see beauty where others do not. Free people are not easily offended. Free people are unafraid to speak truth to stupid. Free people are not chained to resentments. And that's worth fighting for."

As I let these words wash over me again, I pray—first for myself, and then for all of us—that we will take up the hard work of forgiveness for the sake of a broken and desperate world. I believe it is the most important work we can do as the children of a God who grieves and rages against oppression. May we loosen the chains that bind us. May we rise. And may we always pay forward the healing grace and forgiveness of God, until justice reigns.

Faith FORMATION

Whole Community Wednesday

Do you have questions for God? For adults? For kids? For anyone? About anything? If so, come to our first faith formation gathering of the year on October 4th. We will meet for dinner from 5:30 to 6:30 and then go outside for a bonfire and conversation. Kids and adults all have good questions and good insights. Please come and share your wisdom so we can learn from each other. We are looking forward to a fun evening to kick off our faith formation year. This event is the brain child of our own Kolbe R. who has questions to ask and wisdom to share ... and so do you! All parishioners are encouraged to join "Kolbe and Krew" (Marge Virnig) for a great kickoff event.

It's not too late to sign up for faith formation on Wednesday nights and/or Sunday mornings. [Follow this link](#) and fill out the online registration. All are welcome!

Faith Formation Schedule

October 1st - CGS & First Eucharist, 9:30am
October 4th - Wed Night Formation, 5:30pm-7:30pm
October 8th - CGS & Lit of the Word, 9:30am
October 15th - CGS & First Eucharist, 9:30am
October 29th - CGS & Lit of the Word, 9:30am

It doesn't get much better or more convenient than this! On Tuesday, September 26th, Bill Huebsch will give a presentation on *The Joy of the Gospel* here at St. Cecilia's. The Church is shaped by its pastoral ministry. How can we be sure that theology, moral codes, and canon law are at the service of the healing presence of Christ? What keeps us full of hope? What are the most essential elements of our work? How can we follow the example of Jesus in our pastoral ministry? This event is hosted by the Association of Pastoral Ministers but all are invited to attend. RSVPs are helpful for planning hospitality, but drop ins are welcome. Contact Marge at virnigma@comcast.net for more information.

COMMUNITY NEWS

Mission Appeal This Weekend for the Catholic Diocese of Butare

This year our parish is privileged to participate in a Missionary Cooperative Program to support the mission cause of the Diocese of Butare in Rwanda - Africa. The diocese continues with her mission of evangelization through Catholic Education. Our financial support will help them in a water project, to add more classrooms, and to buy computers, books, and school supplies. A second collection for this purpose will be taken. We welcome speaker, DeAnn Weis, who is a local parishioner at St. John Neumann in Eagan.

October: Domestic Violence Awareness Month

Please mark your calendars for next week after the 9:30 Mass. Join us for "DV 101," a short presentation by Domestic Violence Task Force Members, Gwen Gmeinder of St. Peter Claver and Mary Ellen Briel of St. Cecilia's. They will give an introduction to the issue, illustrate its underlying cause, and show a brief video responding to the query: "Why Doesn't an Abused Person Just Leave?"

Season of Creation, Week 4

September 24-30

Read this quote from Saint Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179): "God desires that all the world be pure in His sight. The Earth should not be injured. The Earth should not be destroyed."

Discuss ways we are hurting the earth; choose one topic and do research on it; tell others what you have learned. If possible, make a plan to help with the problem.

Pray: Creator God, your beautiful gift, the earth, has been injured. We ask you to forgive us. We ask you to help us become healers. Amen.

For a brief meditation: <https://cafod.org.uk/pray/prayer-resources/novena-to-st-francis>

Music for Liturgy

Opening	#902
Gloria	#319
Psalm 145	#122
Gospel Acc.	Mass of Plenty
Preparation	#605
Mass of Plenty	#355, 356, 357, 388
Communion	#728
Closing	#663

The Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 55:6-9. *Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so are my ways and thoughts above yours.*

Psalm 145. *Our God is compassion to all creation.*

Philippians 1:20-24, 27. *Christ will be exalted through me, whether I live or die. I long to be freed of this life and to be with Christ, yet it is more urgent that I remain alive for your sake.*

Matthew 20:1-16. *The parable of the owner of the vineyard who hires workers at different hours of the day. He pays the last the same as those who labored all day. Are you envious because I am generous? The last shall be first.*

Have a plan for the ones you leave behind.

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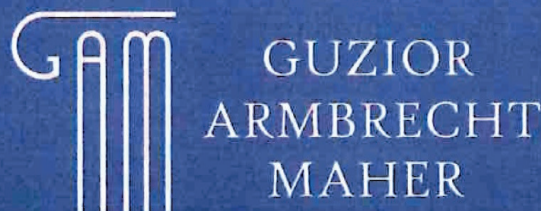
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