



ST. PATRICK'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

4797 Curtis Blvd, Port St John Fl.32927

Sixth Sunday after Trinity July 19, 2020

The passage selected for the Sermon this morning is taken from the Gospel:

“Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there remember that thy brother has ought against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, and be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.”

St. Matt. 5:23-4

I remember that when I was a young, we would debate whether God could make a rock so heavy that he could not lift it. In other words, was it possible for an all-powerful God to create a world in which there was a task He could not perform. While that speculation proved to be fairly pointless, I have learned through the years that God does ask us to do something He is not able to do. Because God is love, and His love for us is manifested in His heroic hope for our ultimate salvation and for good in our life, there is nothing He can regret, nothing he could do that would require our forgiveness. He does, however require that we request His forgiveness as a condition of our salvation.

While it is not hard for us to understand His insistence that we confess our sins against Him, it is not as easy for us to understand the correlative requirement. We hear every Sunday that the great commandment is that we love God with all our heart and with all our soul

and with all our mind, and that we also have to love our neighbor as ourselves. In this Gospel. Jesus makes it clear that that second commandment requires that we also ask forgiveness of our neighbors, our families and friends.

It is certainly difficult to forgive the injuries that are inflicted upon us. We tend to nurture our grudges and relinquish them reluctantly. However, even pop culture and pseudoscience witness the emotional and physical benefits of releasing the toxins that are the byproduct of an unwillingness to forgive. To be the one with the option to forgive is to be in a godly position, and we certainly love to give ourselves godly privilege. It's never easy to forgive, but granting forgiveness isn't as difficult as asking forgiveness.

If we read the verse from this Gospel carefully, that is the challenge that is being issued. “If your brother have aught against you, leave thy gift, go thy way, and be reconciled.” While granting forgiveness is a godly privilege, asking forgiveness, becoming the humble petitioner, puts us back in the proper relationship between the creature and the Creator. Since God has required we serve Him and prove our love for Him by the way we love our neighbor, it is an undeniable requirement of our obedience that we also make ourselves humble petitioners when we ask forgiveness from each other.

Asking forgiveness is preaching the Gospel without words. It is by humbling ourselves, and courageously facing the chance that our request might not be granted, that we change the world. That unselfish act, whether witnessed only by the person we have hurt, or by a wider community, is holiness. There is nothing in this world we gain for ourselves by making that act of humility. Taking that risk can only be justified if we have faith in our Christian destiny to live in the eternal world of God's love. Those locked in this world of selfish pointlessness cannot remain unmoved and unconverted in the face of that witness.

I often wonder what our life in this world would be if only Adam and Eve could have asked forgiveness instead of passing blame on down the line. Remember that they sinned by pride and disobedience, but that wasn't why they were expelled. It was only when being confronted by God to make account of their sin, and refusing to do so, that they were exiled to the sadness, sickness and death that rules the world we inherit.

The unwillingness to accept responsibility for our offenses isn't just a remnant of original sin. It is the character of man that is exhibited throughout the Bible. Cain denies the murder of his brother out of jealousy. Sara denies her scornful laughter when she overheard the promise she would bear a son in her old age. King David, who was willing to put a man to death for stealing his poor neighbor's sheep, was also willing to murder his loyal soldier than ask forgiveness for committing adultery with his wife. Every denial, every rationalization for our sin, every assumption of privilege that excuses us from humbly petitioning forgiveness deepens our suffering in this kingdom of sin and death.

But the courage of asking forgiveness opens this world to the transcendent change that is the

inevitable result of God's grace. Mary Magdalene washes the feet of Jesus with her tears and becomes the first witness of the Resurrection. The Good Thief confesses his sins, and joins Jesus as He opens the gates of Heaven. St Peter weeps in shame as the cock crows over his denials, and is endued with the strength and courage to lead the Apostles to into the Temple at Pentecost and throughout his life until his own crucifixion. St. Thomas repented his unbelief and established the Church in India that has persisted from the first century. St. Paul lamented his complicity in the murder of St Stephen, and extended the witness of Peter and the Apostles to the rest of the World.

Many of the merciful and charitable works that characterize the Christian character are copied in the world because there is reward for doing so in this world. People feed the poor and clothe the homeless because it makes them feel better. People pursue justice because they fear to live under autocracy or anarchy. People even forgive because it makes them feel better or even superior. If we want to make the sacrifice that is the undeniable witness to faith in Jesus Christ and the power of His forgiveness and love to change this world and open to us the next one, then we do it most uniquely when we ask forgiveness for our offenses.

I ask your forgiveness for the times I have offended or disappointed you. I pray we will all have a heartfelt contrition, and the grace and courage to ask forgiveness of all those we have offended, so that we can offer that humble and appropriate sacrifice to Jesus as we come to the altar rail to receive his Body and Blood, His Life and His Love.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.