



24th Week of Ordinary Time 13/14th September

Reflection – Mgr Daniel McHugh

The Lord is Compassion and Love

This week I was struck by the reflection of Rev. Dr Angela Tilby on BBC Radio 4 “Thought for the Day”. She is a fan of Novak Djokovic and spoke of her disappointment at his being disqualified from the tennis tournament.

Having hurt accidentally the lady line judge, he went to apologise to her and see how she was. Later he put an apology on social media, and spoke of his intention to learn from this experience. Angela Tilby, didn’t judge him, but she used the event, which was fresh in her mind, to speak about the tendency these days to speak about “learning and moving on.” The concern she expressed was that we can speak in this way and not really face the basic reality of our wrongdoing: the fault can easily be pushed into the background, while our own image is enhanced. She said Christianity “insists we are self-centered; we have to weep for what is wrong in our hearts”.

Today’s Gospel is one that confronts us with the serious reality of lack of forgiveness in our lives. You will remember that last week the Gospel was about resolving conflict in the Church Community. This week Peter goes on to ask Jesus: “Lord, how often must I forgive my brother if he wrongs me? As often as 7 times?” Now Peter knew the Prophet Amos had spoken of “3 times”, and here he was showing a much more generous heart! He must have been disappointed with the reply “70 x 7 times”, in other words always.

The parable illustrates this for us. The King portrays the image Jesus has of his Father, who always forgives our sins. The challenge is to be like Him, or we face the fact that His forgiveness will not be there for us. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we are given Penance a small act of Satisfaction by which we show God that we recognise his generous forgiveness, but this Gospel today pushes us further.

I was interested in having the opportunity to listen to a podcast by Jordon Peterson, a Clinical Psychologist at a Canadian University, speaking about forgiveness and illustrating it through the story of Jacob and Esau in Genesis. Jacob admits his fault in stealing Esau’s birthright, but makes a generous gift despite Esau’s profession of readiness to forgive. The gift is commensurate with the magnitude of what he stole, and it seals their reconciliation. Forgiveness is not all “one way” it requires the response of the forgiven to be complete. I am not saying we can hold back “forgiveness” until we have the move to reconcile from another. The “model”, the “example” is The Forgiveness of God which is there for

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us to be claimed especially through the Sacrament of Reconciliation; we need to have that same heart, as forgiving as God.

The reality is found in Jesus and His words on the Cross: “Father forgive them; they know not what they do”. Fr Ernest Ferlita SJ writing in his commentary on today’s Gospel says God is ready to forgive all sins but one: that of not forgiving: “That He cannot forgive because it is a sin against the Holy Spirit through whom forgiveness comes.” He says “God achieves forgiveness in us”. We tend to count our achievements in terms of “things not stolen”, “Masses not missed”. God says “love one another, as I have loved you”. God will love in us.

And, he quotes the words of Our Lady in Medjugorje:

“I know you are not able to love your enemies, but I beg you to pray....each day....to the Heart of my son, and my heart, and he will give you the Divine Love that will enable you to love your enemies”.

This week may we forgive because we have been forgiven.

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