

Pentecost
05/27/12

There was a story a few years ago about a man walking in the woods, his heart heavy with grief. As he thought about his life, he knew many things were not right. He thought about those who had lied about him back when he had a job. His thoughts turned to those who had stolen his things and cheated him. He remembered family that had wronged him. His mind turned to the illness he had that no one could cure. His very soul was filled with anger, resentment and frustration. Standing there this day, searching for answers he could not find, knowing all else had failed him, he knelt at the base of an old oak tree to seek the one he knew would always be there, and with tears in his eyes, he prayed:

"Lord, You have done wonderful things for me in this life. You have told me to do many things for you, and I happily obeyed. Today, You have told me to forgive. I am sad, Lord, because I cannot. I don't know how. It is not fair Lord. I didn't deserve these wrongs that were done against me and I shouldn't have to forgive. As perfect as your way is Lord, this one thing I cannot do, for I don't know how to forgive. My anger is so deep Lord, I fear I may not hear you, but I pray that you teach me to do this one thing I cannot do. Teach me To Forgive."

As he knelt there in the quiet shade of that old oak tree, he felt something fall onto his shoulder. He opened his eyes. Out of the corner of one eye, he saw something red on his shirt. He could not turn to see what it was because where the oak tree had been was a large square piece of wood in the ground. He raised his head and saw two feet held to the wood with a large spike through them. He raised his head more, and tears came to his eyes as he saw Jesus hanging on a cross. He saw spikes in His hands, a gash in His side, a torn and battered body, thorns sunk deep into His head. Finally he saw the suffering and pain on His precious face. As their eyes met, the man's tears turned to sobbing, and Jesus began to speak.

Have you ever told a lie, he asked? The man answered - yes Lord. Have you ever been given too much change and kept it? The man answered yes Lord. And the man sobbed more and more. Have you ever taken something from work that wasn't yours, Jesus asked? And the man answered yes Lord. As Jesus asked many more times, "Have you ever?", the man's crying became uncontrollable, for he could only answer yes Lord.

Then Jesus turned His head from one side to the other, and the man felt something fall on his other shoulder. He looked and saw that it was the blood of Jesus. When he looked back up, his eyes met those of Jesus, and there was a look of love the man had never seen or known before. Jesus said, I didn't deserve this either, but I forgive you.

When Jesus appeared to the disciples in the upper room, His first words were, "Peace be with you." And then He said it again and added, "As the Father has sent Me, so I send you." Jesus' mission is complete but His work continues through us, via the power of the Holy Spirit. We are, therefore, messengers of peace, which means we are messengers of forgiveness. The disciples locked themselves in a room out of fear. Are our hearts behind locked doors because we fear the consequences of forgiveness? You see, we simply can't have peace if there is no forgiveness.

On this great birthday of the Church, I ask us to give the gift of forgiveness to someone we struggle with. I ask that each of us strive to forgive someone we feel has wronged us. I ask us to be church to each other. I ask us to be Christ to each other. This may not be the easiest thing you'll do, but I can guarantee it will be the most rewarding.

At morning Mass on Thursday, I quoted Miguel Dulick who said the dearest thing anyone ever told him came from his best friend: "I love you more than you wish I did." Let me repeat that: "I love you more than you wish I did." Words like those simply can't come from an unforgiving heart. Forgiveness brings peace and peace brings love. Are you willing to go that far?