

PRAY Forgiving Creator, you didn't make us perfect. We are works in progress. Help us forgive one another when we betray each other. Help us remember Jesus' forgiving spirit on the cross. Amen.

Feast of Christ the King

November 20, 2022 Vol. 35, No. 8

SPiRIT

HARD *to* FORGIVE

By Bob Bartlett

"So, Mrs. C," Derek asked, "I can't even help the committee set up the gym for homecoming?"

"You are suspended for two weeks from all student activities, just as members of our sports teams are," Mrs. C replied.

But players on the sports teams still practice," Derek argued. "They just can't play in the games."

"Good point," Mrs. C said. "You're the first student council president ever caught drinking. I want to be fair."

Rub it in, Derek thought. He stared at his shoes and then down the shiny hallway, shimmering like a mirage all the way to the gym.

"You can help today. I'll get back to you about the rest of the week. You cannot attend the homecoming rally, game, or dance." Mrs. C walked into her office.

The gym swarmed with activity. People on stepladders were hanging decorations. The artists were painting posters. Three guys and a girl were putting the platform for the DJ into place.

Margaret, the student council vice president, stood in the middle of the gym directing traffic. She noticed Derek as soon as he started walking into the gym.

"Mrs. C sent me to help," Derek said. "Where can I start?"

"Mrs. C sent you down? I don't think so," said Margaret, staring at Derek suspiciously.

"She says I can help today," Derek said, returning the stare. "She's thinking about the rest of the week."

Margaret looked away. "Everybody loves the theme," she said.

"Thanks," Derek said, scanning the gym for a place to start helping.

"Hook up two microphones and put speakers in each corner."

"I'm on it," Derek said, hurrying away from Margaret's heated stare. It could melt glaciers, he thought, as he started laying out the first cord. It felt great to be doing something.

Margaret followed. "I'm really angry with you," she said.

Derek felt his neck and shoulders tighten.

"Were you drinking at the party?" she asked.

"Yes, I was."



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“That was stupid,” Margaret countered. “Every one of us on the student council agreed not to drink or use drugs. It was your idea. We took a pledge together as friends not to use. It was our code.”

Derek couldn't help looking around to see who might be overhearing Margaret's words. He saw his friend Anthony walking toward them.

“You let us down. September isn't over and the student council president makes a big joke of it to the rest of the school and a big joke of us.” Margaret ended.

“Lots of kids party,” Anthony said as he walked by with a poster.

“Exactly,” said Margaret. “We wanted to send a message that not everybody drinks, that we, the leaders in the school, have a good time without it. Ironic, isn't it?”

Derek felt his entire body temperature rising. He wanted to scream *I'm sorry* right in Margaret's face, but he knew if he said one word, he would explode and say something stupid. He had to give her credit. At least she wasn't tiptoeing around it like everybody else.

“I'm disappointed,” Margaret said in a quiet voice. “This really meant something to the rest of us but obviously not to you.”

“It meant something to me,” Derek said.

“How can we trust you after this? We may have to ask for your removal.” Margaret walked quickly back to the center of the gym.

That's in the open, Derek thought. He set up one stand for the DJ's mike and another where Margaret could take his place and welcome everyone to the dance. He didn't notice Diane walking over until she spoke.

“Margaret feels betrayed.”

Derek nodded as he put the mic on the stand.

“Did you drink?”

“Yeah, I did.”

“How much?”

“I had a beer,” Derek answered.

“Just one? I heard you were totally wasted,” said Diane.

“I was down on the floor puking my guts out. Believe what you want. Right now it might as well have been a whole keg.” He set the final mic on the platform. “Just one,” he resumed when Diane seemed interested. “I started drinking a can and remembered the pledge we took last spring. I figured I had to honor it.”

“What happened?” Diane asked.

“I'm not sure.” He sat down on the gym floor. “I think Rick's neighbors called the cops. Matt was wasted and decided to use their flowers as a bathroom.”

“And you got caught,” Diane said.

“Margaret's right. It was stupid.”

“Yeah,” Diane responded.

“And right now two kids are sitting out the soccer season for drinking last summer, and three guys from football, so Mrs. C is not about to cut me any slack, and she shouldn't.”

“Everyone is really hyped about homecoming week,” said Diane, changing the subject. “I think more than any year since I've been here. Good job.”

“Thanks,” Derek said.

“Are you coming?” she asked.

“Can't. Homecoming happens during my two weeks in exile.”

“That's too bad. Maybe we can make the Thanksgiving dance even more fun.”

“Margaret may ask for my removal,” said Derek.

“I can't run an election right in the middle of the school year.” Diane threw her hands in the air. “I don't have time.”

“Thanks,” said Derek. “But I see her point. I crossed a line we drew together. I let down my friends and myself. It's hard to forgive.”

“I CROSSED A LINE *we drew together.*

I LET DOWN MY FRIENDS *and myself.*”



SUNDAY GOSPEL

Feast of Christ the King

Forgiveness is Jesus' ultimate power.

NARRATOR: Jesus was crucified on the place called The Skull and with him two criminals, one on his right and one on his left. People stood by watching. The leaders kept jeering at Jesus.

LEADERS: He saved others. Let him save himself if he is the messiah of God, the chosen one.

NARRATOR: Soldiers also made fun of Jesus. They came up to him and offered him sour wine.

SOLDIERS: If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.

NARRATOR: Over Jesus' head was an inscription, "This is the king of the Jews." One of the criminals hanging beside Jesus blasphemed him.

CRIMINAL 1: Aren't you the messiah? Then save yourself and us.

NARRATOR: The other criminal rebuked him.

CRIMINAL 2: Don't you even fear God? You are under the same sentence of death yourself. We deserve it, after all. We are paying the price for what we have done, but this man has done nothing wrong. Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

JESUS: I assure you, this day you will be with me in paradise.

Luke 23.35-43



Seeking reconciliation

Forgiving the good thief is Jesus' last act before he dies on the cross, his signature action that shows who he is. Restoring relationships continues to be part of the Church's work at Mass and in the sacrament of reconciliation.

Every eucharist contains dialogues between God and the community of believers, who like the repentant thief know they need forgiveness.

In the **Penitential Rite** at the beginning of Mass, the community asks forgiveness, "I confess to Almighty God" or "Lord, have mercy." The priest prays, "May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to life everlasting." We all need forgiveness for the harm we do and the good we fail to do.

Every time we pray the **Creed** at Mass, we proclaim our faith in the forgiveness of sins.

The **Eucharistic Prayer** reminds us that Jesus gave his life so that sins may be forgiven.

When we pray the **Our Father** together at Mass, the prayer commits us to be forgiving like God; otherwise we limit God to being unforgiving to us.

After we pray the Our Father together before communion, the priest asks forgiveness for us, "Lord Jesus Christ, look not on our sins but on the faith of your Church and grant us the peace and unity of your kingdom."

We learn to ask and give forgiveness usually in our closest relationships—in healthy families, among our friends. These are the people with whom we interact most, who matter most to us, and whom we are most likely to hurt or offend.

QUESTIONS 1 How forgivable is Derek's one beer? Do you react more like Anthony, Margaret, or Diane? 2 What do you think the consequences for drinking should be? 3 What example does Jesus give us in regard to forgiveness? 4 What do you find hard to forgive? 5 Where and how does Jesus reign today?



Photo: Wittman

Saying I'm sorry is as important to learn as saying I love you. Saying I accept your apology is a way of starting over and restoring trust in a friendship. Really forgiving someone creates new energy and gives life in relationships.

In the **sacrament of reconciliation** we Catholics ask God's forgiveness and work at keeping our relationships right. Human beings are free. We can make loving, life-giving decisions, but we can also mess up. We can make wrong, self-centered choices that hurt and harm others.

Sometimes we don't see consequences or don't want to see them. For example, one rides with a friend who has been drinking or believes



The sacrament of reconciliation restores us to God's grace and friendship and restores and repairs relationships among us.

Catechism of the Catholic Church #1468-69, 1442-1460

gossip and drops a friend without checking out the rumor. A high school couple find themselves alone at one of their homes and have sex with a pregnancy the last result on their minds.

Sometimes teens live through painful family problems that are not their fault. Cold wars of silence between parents. Adultery. Divorces. Alcoholism. New relationships with stepparents. Some parents are much too strict and untrusting; some provide no rules at all.

Jesus challenges us to mutual love and service of one another—to love one another as he does, to be compassionate as God is, to love even our enemies. He models compassion in his attitude toward

the repentant thief on the cross. The repentant thief models the desire to set his relationship with God right.

The **sacrament of reconciliation** invites us to deepen our response to Jesus' call to be self-giving as he is. We express sorrow for ways we have failed in loving God and neighbor as he taught. The priest calls us to make amends—to pray, to read scripture, to talk to the person we hurt, to restore property, to take responsibility for harm we can't undo. In reconciliation we seek to right our relationships with God and one another.

The Church's prayer of absolution remembers that we live in God's unfailing, forgiving love. God is the Father of mercies. Jesus, God's Son, through his death and resurrection reconciles the world to himself and sends the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins.

Individuals can seek forgiveness in this sacrament for serious sins. Parishes celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation as a community usually in

Advent and Lent. To be Christian is to belong to a forgiving and reconciling people. Our love for one another reveals God's presence in our world.

PSALM 139

Divide your group in half to pray the psalm, half taking part 1, and half part 2.

1: O God, you have examined me and you know me.

2: You know everything I do; from far away you understand my thoughts.

1: Where can I go to escape from you? Where can I get away from your presence?

2: You see me, whether I am working or resting; you know all my actions. Even before I speak, you know what I will say.

1: If I go up to heaven, you are there.

2: If I lie down in the world of the dead, you are there.

1: Examine me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts.

2: Find out if there is any evil in me and guide me in the ways of everlasting life.

FAITH in ACTION

1 Spend five minutes in silence in a quiet room or around a lighted candle. Examine your conscience. Ask yourself: What self-centered, harmful patterns do I need to change in my life? Then pray Psalm 139 as a group. **2** Try with your family using the few minutes on the way to church as a time to say I'm sorry for any hurtful things that have happened during the week. This can be a healing time that culminates in celebrating Eucharist together.