

Pastor's Corner - September 11, 2011 - Forgiveness is an Act of Life

As we remember today the tenth anniversary of the terrible disaster of 9/11 we are invited to reflect on the Gospel readings which come at this time from **Chapter 18 in Matthew**. Matthew has Jesus teach his disciples and us about the quality of our community life. **Jesus describes the qualities which should characterize those who belong to his community, those who call themselves Christians, Christ-like.** Jesus saw the importance of a community who would live in a way which would show outsiders, non-believers, non-Christians, that he was with them with His Spirit. Jesus had not preached for three years to tell individuals that they were saved. No, being Christ-like was meant for the whole community.

In our Western world of the "I" and "me" we are tempted to live our Christian lives by ourselves: pray our own prayers and do our best to help others, and then we will have our reward in heaven! Neat and simple! What is wrong with that? Nothing really, except that "it ain't Christian!" Jesus did not want us to be stay-at-home individual believers, doing good. Jesus wanted us to continue as his community after he left, worshiping together and together going into the world living daily lives that proclaim his name to others: yes, to be a light on the lamp stand, a city built on a hilltop. **If we truly believe in a God-with-us, the Emmanuel; if we truly celebrate at each Eucharist the real presence of Christ as nourishment, then we take to heart the words of Jesus: "do this in memory of me." We become God's real presence in the way we live. What better way for a community to point to Jesus and to be a beacon of light, than to reach out to others and to practice forgiveness.**

In the Matthew 18 the same pattern is repeated: a saying by Jesus, followed by a parable, and Jesus closes with a reference to the will of God. **Matthew in this way joins two of Jesus' main concerns: the responsibility of discipleship and the search for the will of God.**

In **18:10-14** Jesus advises his followers that they and we should protect the least, the poorest, the most vulnerable in the community; that they and we must even reach out to find any members who are lost or who have drifted away. "So it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these should be lost."

In **18:15-20** Jesus advises us to do everything to keep someone within the community including bringing the person to see their wrong ways, their sins. Only after everything was tried and a person did not change could a person be expelled, which meant that a person was effectively dead: without a community one had no network, no support, no hope. So, a very important aspect of community life for Jesus is the need for recognition of needed change, forgiveness and reconciliation.

In **18:21-35** Jesus continues this important teaching that **forgiveness, not retaliation, is truly a sign of his community, because forgiveness, and the patience and humility which go with it, unifies a community, strengthens the bond between the members of the community.** We see this in the community which is the family. We see it in those cultures, including our own native cultures, where there is an emphasis on mutual responsibility. **Forgiveness is an act of true courage as well as an act of non-violence. In forgiving we choose to break the cycle of violence; we refuse to seek revenge for a wrong done. Mahatma Gandhi:** "Nonviolence is the greatest force at the disposal of humankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction." **Ben Sirach** in 28:2: "Forgive your neighbor the wrong that is done, and then your sins will be pardoned when you pray." The one forgiven and the one who forgives are both set free. **St. Dominic:** "The seed hoarded dies, while the seed sown bears much fruit. When forgiveness is hoarded, it dies. When it is shared with others it bears much fruit."

Shalom

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