

**Year B\* Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany\* 2/19/09**

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**Forgive Us Our Sins**

And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after" having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." What an annoyance for our friend on the mat who is brought to Jesus to receive healing for his paralysis only to find Jesus telling him he needs to have his sins forgiven. He goes to Jesus for physical healing but discovers he needs spiritual work.

You know the first thought this guy has once he hears he really needs forgiveness is, "How did he know about that?" Not that he was a terrible sinner but that we are all in the same boat. We all need forgiveness of our sins more than we need physical healing.

I say the Lord's prayer at least three times a day, sometimes more. I try to pray it not only in my head but from my heart.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done... So three times a day I pray, Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. And I need every one of those times.

Realizing I need to be forgiven is hard. Realizing I need to say, "I'm sorry" is hard. Realizing I've made a mistake and need to own up to it is hard.

When I sin against someone something hardens in me almost instantly. It's like I have to protect myself from admitting I'm human, from admitting I make mistakes, from admitting I don't always do the right thing. So I harden inside to protect a false image of myself. The image that I am perfect, that I never make mistakes, that I always do the right thing. I know it sounds ridiculous but I do this all the time. I do it everywhere.

It's my first reaction to a mistake or a sin.

This hardening inside to protect a false image of ourselves doesn't work. Because the truth is no one is perfect, everyone makes mistakes, we all need forgiveness.

The good news is that there is forgiveness for each of us. It spills out from God and into our lives through each other, through Jesus, through our commitment to go to God three times a day, or three hundred times a day, to receive forgiveness and give forgiveness.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

This week I was working on a new creed. You've heard of the Nicene Creed, well it's pretty old and I thought it could use some work. So I wrote Rick's Creed. In it I say;

I pray to the God who is positive, loving, merciful, challenging, mysterious yet ever-present. I pray to Jesus the powerful human embodiment of the God I believe in. I follow him as my Lord and Savior. When my scriptures or my tradition turn him into a vengeful, merciless, person, I know my Lord is always forgiving, not seven times but seven times seventy.

(From *My Creed* by Me)

God is forgiving. We can go to God anytime, every time, for forgiveness. With each opening of ourselves to God in our mistakes, in our messiness, God forgives us, again, and again, and again. We think God tires of us but God does not. Each moment of forgiveness is an essential moment of yielding our selves to the mystery of God. God welcomes that moment over and over again.

This process of going to God for forgiveness keeps us soft inside, keeps us supple in the hands of God, keeps us turning ourselves over to God and what God wills to make of us. What God wills for us, not what we will for ourselves.

Our friends in A.A. have a wonderful saying. As they are sitting there in a meeting, some of them because Alcohol has ruined their lives, or their families, or their careers, they say, "My best thinking got me here." My best thinking got me here. Now I'll try God. Implicit in this admission of our craziness is a surrender to God. Every time we need forgiveness, or need to forgive, we move deeper into the surrender of our selves to God.

It is not easy to make this surrender. We want to harden inside and protect our false self. Yet life in the Church will call us again and again to this place of surrender. Because life in the Church always furnishes us with plenty of reason to need forgiveness and need to offer forgiveness. We are all so different, so human, so prone to make mistakes, so quick to sin against one another.

This is not unusual. It's not even bad. God has called us together to bump into each other. To learn how to forgive and be forgiven. Our mistakes are not bad things they are open doors in our selves for God to enter in.

This week I heard that our famous Bishop Robinson, you know, the first openly gay man ever to be elected Bishop, admitted himself into an alcoholic rehabilitation unit.

My first thought was, "Oh no, this is going to look bad." That's me protecting the false self. That Bishop Robinson has a problem with alcohol and is getting help for it is not a problem no matter how it looks. Bishop Robinson is just like you and me. We are all broken people

in need of healing, sinners in need of forgiving, addicts in need of recovery. We're just addicted to different things. The Church is the perfect place to admit we all need help whatever our specific problems are.

The good news is that God is here and will help us as we surrender ourselves to him (sic). In every case the path is the surrender to God, surrender to a power greater than our selves, surrender to God's will and not our will.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done...  
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.  
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