

## **Can you forgive me?**

**A reflection about understanding the immense challenges of forgiving others in our lives.**

**13/9/20**

**I speak in the name of Jesus the Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father.**

**Amen.**

**Let us pray:**

**Almighty and everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope, and charity; and, that we may obtain that which thou dost promise, makes us to love which thou dost command through Jesus Christ our Lord. Who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.**

**Amen.**

The Lord be with you.

An extract from today's Gospel reading:

"Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"

Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."

(Matt 18: 21 – 22)

In 1993 when I was studying towards my Higher Diploma of Education at UCT, all students were required to complete in-service training in various community schools. UCT, in an attempt to remain politically correct and progressive, insisted that all students studying to be a teacher complete a stint at a township school. This was one year prior to the ANC coming into power in the first free general election. Political times were tough and communities were tense.

One morning, all the students were called to gather at one of the main lecture halls for an important announcement. A young American student had just been

stabbed to death whilst travelling through one of the townships in Cape Town. UCT was not prepared to put any lives at risk and we were no longer to be deployed to any township schools for that year.

The name of the young American student who had died?

Her name was Amy Biehl.

Amy was born in 1967 and she was an American graduate of Stanford University and an anti-Apartheid activist in South Africa. She was a student at the University of the Western Cape as a scholar in the Fulbright Program.

As she drove three friends home to the township of Gugulethu on the 25<sup>th</sup> of August, 1993, a mob pulled her from her car and stabbed and stoned her to death.

How did her family feel?

How do people forgive one another for what they have done?

How on earth do you and I forgive one another for deeds that we have done to each other?

We read in the Gospel of Matthew this morning how Peter asks Jesus how many times he should forgive his brother when he sins against him. Jesus replies that, in essence, he must always forgive.

I don't know about you, but there have been times in my life when I have really struggled to forgive somebody about something. I have become a little better about forgiveness, as I have aged, but there have been times that I have been very angry and upset when someone has wronged me and I have found it very challenging and difficult to forgive.

Psychologists have suggested that there are a few things we need to understand about the act of forgiveness:

- 1) Forgiveness is not about saying what happened is ok or even accepting the person who wronged you. Instead, forgiveness is choosing to accept what happened, as it happened, rather than what could or should have happened.
- 2) Forgiveness can mean that you let go and you can love from a distance.

- 3) Forgiveness can mean that you step into your present rather than anchoring in the past.
- 4) The act of forgiveness is a process and takes time. There will also be anger and grief in this process.

What does Jesus teach us about forgiveness?

Jesus often spoke about forgiveness, forgave those who sinned against others, forgave those who sinned against him, and asked the Church to continue his healing ministry. Jesus taught, "If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you." (Matt 6:14)

For Jesus, forgiveness was not an automatic, it was intentional, a conscious choice. After the Roman soldiers had scourged and nailed him, Jesus prayed, "Father forgive them." (Luke 23:34)

After the resurrection, Jesus had every right to be angry. Peter had denied him and the others had deserted him. When He entered the Upper Room, they deserved a severe reprimand, but instead, with divine compassion Jesus said not once, but three times, "Peace be with you." (John 20: 22-23)

The biggest aspect that you and I need to learn and remember about forgiveness is that through the act of forgiveness, we are ultimately freeing ourselves to become the person we were meant to be – the person seeking Christ in our lives and in our hearts, thus being part of the Kingdom of God. If we fail to forgive, then we fail ourselves, as we alienate our hearts from Jesus and the community we love. This does not mean for one moment that it is an easy task. On the contrary, forgiving someone else for hurting you will sometimes take every fibre of strength that you have in your body... and you will have to wake up each day and start all over again for many, many days until the pain slowly subsides. This takes courage. It is much easier to bear a grudge and to seek revenge. It is much more difficult to sit with the pain until it slowly subsides over time.

How do we forgive as Christians?

- 1) Firstly, we acknowledge to ourselves that we do not have the strength to do it on our own. We ask the Holy Spirit every day to fill us and to guide us on our daily journey of forgiving others.

- 2) Secondly, we ensure that we remain part of a worshipping community where we are loved and supported by the people of God. This is essential if we are to succeed in moving on with our lives in a positive and practical manner.
- 3) Thirdly, we acknowledge to ourselves that unless we forgive others, we are essentially trapping ourselves in a negative spiral where we are alienating ourselves from God. Nelson Mandela himself once said about his freedom, "As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison."

What about Amy Biehl?

This tragic story turned out to be a remarkable story about forgiveness...

In 1994, Amy Biehl's parents, Linda and Peter, founded the Amy Biehl Foundation Trust to develop and empower youth in the townships, in order to discourage further violence. Two of the men convicted of Amy's murder worked for the foundation as part of its program.

In 1998, all were pardoned by South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Biehl's family supported the release of the men.

Her father shook their hands and stated..." The most important vehicle of reconciliation is open and honest dialogue... we are here to reconcile a human life that was taken without an opportunity for dialogue. When we are finished with this process we must move forward with linked arms."

This is forgiveness.

This is the Kingdom of God in action.

Nelson Mandela remembered Amy whilst accepting his Congressional Gold Medal on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of September 1998:

“Among those we remember today is young Amy Biehl. She made our aspirations her own and lost her life in the turmoil of our transition, as the new South Africa struggled to be born in the dying moments of Apartheid. Through her, our peoples have also shared the pain of confronting a terrible past, as we take the path towards the reconciliation and healing of our nation.”

Forgiveness is part of our human and Christian journey.

I wish you all strength in His name.

I also wish you peace and a restful Sunday.

Every blessing for today and the week ahead.

Fr Darron.

