Forgiven
Twenty-Fourth Sunday In Ordinary Time 2017

Reflection By: Deacon Paul V. Hursh

Today’s scriptures focus on the central function of the Church. I can say with confidence that our central function is the inspirable dyad of healing and reconciling. I say this because this too was Jesus’ action in the world, and now, it is our role as the body of Christ. Healing and forgiveness were inseparable in Jesus’ ministry. Recall how often he would forgive the persons their sin as a precursor to physical healing. Then as now forgiveness frees us for healing.

Jesus never made right action or right conduct a condition for his loving action. He understood that to make one whole goes hand-in-hand with making them one with their community. When he forgave their sins it allowed for their return to community. During his ministry he told his disciples that “whatever you bind on earth with be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth with be loosed in heaven.” (Matthew 18:18) After his resurrection Jesus appeared to his disciples and said, “Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are
Clearly his message and legacy is to reconcile broken relationships, and thus, to heal the world. How can we, as the body of Christ today, carry on this mission?

For most of us the best place to begin is within our homes and local community. This also may present significant challenges; because our emotions run highest with those we are close to. It is also quite difficult to reconcile with those we were once close, but now we have become estranged. The one thing to keep in mind when extending the forgiveness we have received from God is that there are no prerequisites. Like God’s initiative towards us, reconciling efforts are to be extended to others even if we judge them unworthy – in fact we are admonished not to judge at all. (Matthew 7:1) It is like the parable of the wedding banquet where the king extends the invitation to everyone regardless of his or her worthiness. (Matthew 22:1-13) It is the very extravagant nature of God’s mercy that makes grace so powerful in transforming lives. God wants us to exercise this same kind of healing power in the lives of others.

You may ask, “What am I to do if I extend forgiveness and it is rejected?” This is always a challenging situation and it may be the reason we are reticent to offer forgiveness in the first place. Please do not postpone forgiveness, because of your fear of rejection. Any acceptance of reconciliation must be by free choice of the other and so it is always contingent. Remember that many of the intended wedding guests, in the parable cited above, had perfectly good excuses for not accepting the king’s invitation. Like God we can only make an offer to join in the celebration. If we are refused, perhaps they may later reconsider. We can only do what is for us to do. We do it, not because we are better than the ones in need of forgiveness, we forgive because we are as needy as others, and are forgiven sinners ourselves. Are we ready to participate in this banquet to be given by a generous and all-inclusive King? Are we ready to eat with sinners? Are we ready to say, as did the Pagan centurion, “Lord I am not worthy to receive you under my roof, but only say the word and my soul will be healed?”

Today we are participating in a banquet given by a generous King. A word of caution here…Are we ready to do what would have been unthinkable for a Jew at the time of the Last Supper? – To eat human flesh and to drink blood. We come here totally unworthy of the gift that is being offered, to stand with others who are equally unworthy. The good news is that these gifts are freely given, as is the forgiveness we seek in our prayers today. Are we ready to prepare ourselves for this meal by extending forgiveness to others, freely and without condition? If your answer is yes, then let us continue in faith as we present our gifts on this altar and so express our thanksgiving for all God offers, and reconcile ourselves to one another in love.

In the end we come to the realization that we are all frail and foolish. We have been told that grace is to be found in the universe, but in our human foolishness and shortsightedness we imagine that divine grace is finite and for this reason we doubt. Then, the moment comes when our eyes are opened, and we see and realize that grace is infinite. Grace…demands nothing from us but that we shall await it with confidence and acknowledge it in gratitude. Grace…makes no condition and singles out none of us in particular; grace takes all…into its bosom and releases us from the bonds of sin. This is what it means to be forgiven.