

Easter Forgiveness

When you stop and think about it, Peter gives a really remarkable speech in today=s first reading. As he frankly professes at the outset, those he addresses have just executed the very man he had dedicated his life to following, the man in whom he had found the very face of God. Yet he does not rise to denounce them. He does not call upon God to avenge his master=s suffering and death at their hands. On the contrary he appeals to them as brothers and sisters. Far from condemning them, he professes to see in the tragedy of these past days, the will of God at work.

Peter has come a long way from when he had first learned of his master=s coming passion. Then Peter had refused to hear of it, only to be rebuked by Jesus himself. Peter has also come a long way from that night of his master=s arrest, when he had confessed undying loyalty to hiim, only to then deny him three times just hours later.

Peter has come along way to reach this day. And what he has to say today is that he has not reached this place on his own. His new found peace and serenity is not of his own making. He too has been raised up, no less than his master, raised up to new life by the power of his risen Lord and Master=s all forgiving love. Jesus has forgiven Peter his second guessing, even betrayal in his hour of needBand Peter has the humility and the wisdom not only to move on and accept Jesus forgiveness, but to realize that this forgiveness too is not meant for him aloneBthat indeed it was to offer just such healing forgiveness that Jesus had been sent by the Father in the first place. And that it is to preach and to practice such forgiving love that Peter is now to dedicate his life.

And so Peter reaches out to those who had called for his master=s death only days before. Not only does he not hold it against them, but he assures them that through Jesus= suffering and death at their hands, AGod has brought to fulfillment what he had announced long ago through all the prophets.@ Not only does he bear them no grudge but he invites them to join together with him, to turn their lives around, too and experience, as he has experienced, the healing power of God=s forgiving love.

The Spirit of God writes straight through crooked lines. Thankfully, for who among us does not lead a crooked life, straying from the straight and narrow, wandering into the dead end of an addiction, or getting lost in some all too transient desire, or striving for some all too

illusory status. Who among us is not in continual need of conversion, of turning ourselves back around and rediscovering our way. And if true of each of us as individuals how much more so for us as a country these days? But conversion can only happen in conjunction with forgiveness. We must be forgiven our offences if we are to be liberated from them. Forgiven by those we have harmed, as Peter forgives the Jews that they might turn around and embrace who they have crucified. So when and where we have harmed ourselves, as individuals, as a community, as a country, when and where we have harmed ourselves we must also forgive ourselves and accept the forgiveness offered us by the Spirit of God in our hearts and our lives. For the Holy Spirit is a flame that cannot be doused or quenched however much water is thrown upon it, a fire that cannot be smothered, however large the blanket thrown over it. For the fuel of that fire does not come from the world without but from within and above.

Here too Peter can be a model. Peter can only forgive himself because he has accepted Christ's forgiveness of him and has extended that forgiveness to those who had crucified his friend and master. By accepting God's forgiveness of us and our extending that forgiveness to those who have opposed us, we too can begin to forgive the one who is too often our own greatest enemy-- ourselves.

Thus it is written that the Christ would suffer, and rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins would be preached in his name to all the nations. @ May we walk that talk... and so redeem the evils we suffer and perpetrate, and so be saved.