

3rd Sunday of Easter
Power of Forgiveness

Are you a person who “tells it like it is?” Do you tend to challenge people rather than console them? If so, you probably like St. Peter’s approach in the first reading today. Peter is preaching to his fellow Jews shortly after Jesus’ suffering, death and resurrection. He tells them that they denied Jesus, the Holy and Righteous One; that they put the author of life to death! In other words, Peter is calling them murderers and hence great sinners. He does do some consoling, however, when he tells them that they acted out of ignorance... but he still insists that they have to repent and be converted so that their sins may be wiped away.

Do you consider yourself to be a sinner? Do you believe that you need to have your sins forgiven? On this Third Sunday of Easter our focus is on the “power of forgiveness.”

There was a book written over forty years ago entitled “Whatever Became of Sin?” It was written by a psychologist by the name of Karl Menninger. His basic thesis is that in the modern era we tend not to call wrong actions sins any longer. We call them crimes, mental illness, addictions, misbehaviors, etc. The priest is replaced by the cop or judge or by the psychologist. When was the last time that you used the word “sin” to describe one of your actions or the actions of others? Have you ever used the word “sin” around your children?

Sin by definition is a wrong action done with a certain amount of knowledge and freedom. The violation of any of the Ten Commandments is one way of determining wrong actions. For example, when Peter tells his fellow Jews that they put Jesus to death he was implying that they did something wrong (Thou shall not kill.) However, he qualifies the amount of knowledge they had by saying that they acted out of ignorance. In other words, they lacked

a certain amount of knowledge but they had enough knowledge to make their action wrong. He presupposes here that they acted freely.

Sin is the topic of St. John's letter in the second reading. He presupposes that the Christian community that he writing to is composed of sinners. The good news, he says, is that Jesus died not only for their sins but also for those of whole world. In this way he emphasizes the power of forgiveness.

Even the newly risen Jesus in the gospel reading talks to his disciples about how the prophets and psalmists foretold that repentance for the forgiveness of sin would be preached in his name.

If you are read the book "Perfectly Yourself" by Matthew Kelly during this past Lenten Season you know that he has written other books as well, one of them entitled "Rediscover Catholicism." He has a chapter on forgiveness in this book that focuses on his experience of forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. He writes:

When I close my eyes in prayer, I see the-person-I- am and the best version of myself side by side, and I am challenged to change. This is what takes place in Confession. We prepare by asking ourselves some soul-searching questions in an examination of conscience. Those questions give birth to the dual vision of the person we are at this moment and the person we are capable of becoming. We then bring our faults, failings, and flaws to God (Note: no mention of sin.). Through this process we open ourselves up to God and the mysterious gift of grace. This grace often takes the form of a stronger desire to become a-better-version-of-ourselves.

What is your experience of God's forgiveness? How forgiving are you?

