

Forty Weeks ~ Sacred Story



Week Twenty Two Encouragements & Wisdom

E & W reflections are additional helps for your Sacred Story prayer journey. Reflect on them ahead of your prayer exercises for the week or outside of your fifteen-minute prayer windows during the week.

Mercy—Mercy-Mercy- Mercy

At the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus teaches a radical new way of dealing with retaliation and one's enemies. He sidelines the Old Testament teaching of an "eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" and counsels his disciples to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." (Mt. 5:38-48)

And at the end of the instruction on the Lord's Prayer, Jesus says: "If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions." (Mt. 6:15)

And some of the very last words of Jesus from the cross as he dies for our salvation are: "Father forgive them, for they don't know what they doing." (Lk. 23:34)

The Sermon on the Mount, the Lord's Prayer and Jesus' words from the cross all instruct us as to a profound spiritual mission of each Christian for our holiness and peace — forgiving others who have harmed us. Forgiving others does not mean excusing their behavior. Forgiving others does not mean refusing to take appropriate steps to defend oneself. Forgiving others does not mean allowing oneself to be victimized. Forgiving others means forgiving them from your heart, whether they admit their fault or not.

Who had a better "right" to be outraged by the injustice of how he was treated than Jesus?

He was totally innocent and yet condemned to a horrible torture and death. Did he refuse to forgive the Jewish leaders (and the Roman soldiers who carried it out) for the horrible crime of his torture and execution? For the religious leader's complicity in this horrible crime also involved their profound hardness of heart in their rejection of Jesus' prophetic mission of mercy from the Father.



Jesus forgave everyone involved and by so doing *forever broke the force of evil in the world*. The one who was *totally innocent*—the Lamb of God—teaches us how to break evil's force in our own lives and in our world—through forgiveness. A significant element of evil's design counts on us to be so outraged by the injustices, great and small, committed against us that we will use them as a pretext to live in anger and/or seek vengeance in return. Forgiveness breaks evil's power and opens the pathway to peace and holiness.

A STORY: At a college anti-violence rally, I heard a young nineteen year-old coed describe her sexual abuse by a relative when she was fourteen. She angered many in her audience when she proclaimed she no longer wished it had never happened to her. How could she say something so

outrageous? She said she forgave her attacker and had developed a tremendous ministry helping other young women facing similar tragedies. So much grace flowed from her ministry in helping others, that she could *honestly* say that God had transformed evil into blessing—*through forgiveness*. The cross of Christ becomes our salvation! And carrying the cross of Christian forgiveness will also break evil’s power in our lives.

A TRUTH: The act of forgiveness requires grace. Even the *desire* to forgive someone who has hurt us requires grace. St. Ignatius says that if you can’t pray for something directly (because you can’t summon the will to do so, like forgiving someone who has seriously harmed you) then pray for the grace to WANT to do that which you can’t accomplish on your own. Our forgiveness of others will ALWAYS require God’s grace. Once we know whom we need to forgive, then we must seek God’s grace to *want* to forgive them. If we can’t summon the desire to forgive them out of Christian love, then consider that not forgiving them locks you in anger, destroying your own peace of mind and heart. Harboring anger like this is a killer to your spiritual life—and is sinful as well. So perhaps seek the grace to forgive so that you are not controlled by your own angers.

AN APPLICATION TO SACRED STORY: The “Mercy” chapter in Sacred Story prayer invites you to offer forgiveness to others AND to seek God’s forgiveness for where you need healing. Sacred Story awareness exercises “during the day” invite us to attend to strong angers, fears and grief that can surface in our day. When an event or encounter “ignites” our passions, we can look at the immediate ignition event and then ask if there is a prior life-event that fuels this anger.

Some years ago, I knew of a young man who was falsely accused of cheating. The accusation carried the real risk of seriously harming his academic career, yet he had solid evidence the accusation was false. It was only a matter of days before the school’s leadership would clear him because of the evidence. Yet the student was seething over the false accusation and also terribly frightened awaiting his vindication. It was hard for me to convince him to “let go” of his anger toward his accuser and see what might be at the root of his terrible anxieties. Because he had solid evidence of his innocence his anxieties were really irrational.

It took God’s grace for him to ask for deeper insight. What he remembered was an event from his childhood. He had a piggy bank his parents kept for him. They would put his earnings from his summer jobs into the bank. One week there was \$20 missing and his parents accused him of taking the money. He protested he had not taken it but they did not believe him and they accused him of lying to them. He felt powerless to defend himself. A month later the mom found the \$20 in her purse—she forgot to put it in his bank. He told me his parents never apologized to him.

The false accusation at school and the terrible anxiety it produced in him was surfacing this deep anger and profound injustice from his past. Now that God had opened his heart and memory, he was faced with the Christian task of forgiving. He had to forgive his parents for betraying their role as good parents and he had to also forgive the other student who had falsely accused him.

Not every event will have a “historical” root like this, but very many do. Seek awareness of your life and always ask God where you need to forgive others and where you need to seek God’s forgiveness for your own transgressions.

