Homily of 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year A

Two friends, Mik and Vig, were on a journey through a desert and a hill. As they were walking on the sand of the desert Mik missed his step. He held Vig to gain his balance. Unfortunately, Vig lost his balance also and both of them fell. In order to remember where they fell, Vig marked the spot with his iron staff. The journey continued. They got to a hill. Vig was unable to climb. Mik supported Vig and both of them climbed over the hill. In order to remember how they made it over the hill Mik marked the spot where they got over the hill with his iron staff. On their way back, the mark made by Mik on a rock of the hill remained very visible. Both men happily remembered how they made it over the hill. Then, they journeyed across the desert, never saw the mark on the sand, and never remembered where and how they felled. We pray that the breeze of each day erase our offences against one another, just like the desert wind erased the mark on the sand where the men felled. Amen.

Christianity is the most radical religion because of its teaching on forgiveness. No other religion has so much emphasis on forgiveness like Christianity. Retaliation and revenge are clearly enshrined in the spirituality of some religions and deep in the way of life of many men and women. The first reading says, "Anger and wrath, these are abominations, and the sinful man will possess them." Abomination means that something is detestable or despicable. The reading explains how forgiveness is important to our prayer life and our relationship with God: "Forgive your neighbor the wrong he has done, and then your sins will be pardoned when you pray. Does a man harbor anger against a brother, and seek for healing from the Lord? Does he have no mercy toward a man like himself, and yet pray for his own sins?" Jesus emphasizes this teaching in Mark 11:25-26, "And when you stand to pray, if you have anything against anyone, forgive, so that your heavenly Father may also forgive your sins." In the Lord's Prayer, we pray to God, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us" (Matthew 6:12).

One of the lessons that can be drawn from the Gospel parable is that we sin against God every day, many times mortal sins, and he does not treat us according to our sins. Yet, many times, we are very unforgiving to one another, even over minor offences. At the end of the Lord's Prayer Jesus adds, "If you forgive others their wrongdoings, your Father in heaven will also forgive yours. If you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive you either" (Matthew 6:14-15).

Sometimes, this question is asked, “I have forgiven my neighbor, yet I still remember the offence. Does it mean that I have not forgiven my neighbor?” My understanding is that memories last very long and sometimes last forever. However, prayer, time and good will do heal and erase offences from the mind or at least reduce their vivid impressions on the mind. When this happens, the offences may be remembered but faintly. Even if we remember an offence, we have forgiven our neighbor when:
(1) The offence is no longer vivid in our mind. We have forgotten the details.
(2) We no longer make reference to the offence to support any kind of claim or season for our action or actions.
(3) We are no longer upset when we remember the offence or the offender.
(4) We, in no way, wish to retaliate or wish ill luck to the offender as punishment for the offence. (5) We treat the offender with acceptance, understanding and kindness.
(6) When we remember the offence, we remember the lesson or lessons we might have learned from the event.
(7) When we remember the offence, we remember that we have offended others many times, and many times, we are forgiven.

Let us conclude with a word of advice from St. Paul, “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32).

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