

Scripture Reading

A Reading from the Gospel according to Luke (*Luke 23:33-34*)

When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. But Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." The Gospel of the Lord. R. Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ.

Reflection ~ Be the first to make peace. You will be specially blessed.

Jesus made peace in our behalf with His Heavenly Father through the shedding of His own Blood. There is always the right time to do the right thing. For Jesus, the right moment to present His plea to His Heavenly Father for the forgiveness of the sins of humankind was at the end of 33 years of hardship and sacrifice, at the climax of His sufferings, just moments before He breathed His last on the cross of crucifixion. ... *and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His Blood, shed on the cross (Colossians 1:20).* Through His own action, Jesus invites us to follow in His footsteps in making peace with those who have offended us.

Forgiveness sets our hearts free and deals the kingdom of darkness a heavy blow. Once we make a firm decision to forgive the one who offended us, we set ourselves free from bondage to Satan, destroying his power and influence over us. The Evil One will no longer be able to leverage on our unforgiveness to build up anger, hatred, grudges, bitterness and woundedness. Unforgiveness can lead to a multitude of sins and closes the heart to God's graces. Prolonged unforgiveness is like a spiritual cancer that can lead to death of the soul and diseases of the human body. Whilst not all sufferings are due to personal sins, there is a connection between the health of the soul and that of the body. After Jesus healed a sick man at the pool of Bethesda, He found him later at the temple and said to him, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." (cf. John 5:14).

But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins (Matthew 6:15). Jesus tells us clearly that we need to forgive those who offended us if we are seeking forgiveness from God for our sins. *Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin (John 8:34).* As long as we remain in sinfulness, our weakened hearts and minds are open and susceptible to the influence of the Evil One, and we will find it very difficult to do the good things we want to do. Thus, St Paul lamented over the effects of his sinfulness: *For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do - this I keep on doing (Romans 7:19).*

As long as we persist in unforgiveness, our gifts are not acceptable to God. *Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift (Matthew 5:23-24).* It is pointless to offer the Lord many sacrifices and prayers when we do not wish to break free from the sin of unforgiveness. Our salvation remains at risk if our own sins remain unforgiven because of our own hard-heartedness and lack of forgiveness towards others.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God (Matthew 5:9). The Kingdom of heaven has no place for those with unforgiving hearts. Scripture tells us we should not be led by our human feelings but by faith (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:7) and the Holy Spirit that lives within us. *For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God (Romans 8:13-14).* By ourselves, we cannot do it. But led by God's Spirit and strengthened by His grace, we are more than conquerors as St Paul reminds us (cf. Romans 8:37).

Conversation with Jesus

Precious Lord, despite my good intentions, again and again I offend You as I fall into temptation. We are weak. Be our strength! Give me Your heart so that I can forgive and be the first to make peace with those who offended me. Let my every action be out of love for You alone. Then I will be able to forgive more readily. May whatever I suffer through their offences be lovingly offered to You for their conversion. Teach me Lord to love everyone even my offenders. Mary, Mother of Salvation, teach me to be loving like You. Thank You, Jesus. Praise You, Jesus.