

Fr. Romeo Evangelista's Homily  
September 15, 2019  
24th Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)

I took a superficial look at the Gospel, Luke 15: I said to myself: Oh, I get it—the goodness of God vis-à-vis someone who has been bad. Easy to discuss – conversion and forgiveness! But I have to confess that forgiveness is not at all easy. Some people may more easily forgive, others find it hard to do.

A friend of mine suffered from her husband's infidelity and eventual abandonment. One day, despondent and hopeless, the husband returns repentant. My friend, whatever got into her head, unquestioningly welcomes him. That evening, the eldest son arrives from college, a young man who suffered a lot from his father's actions. He sees his father back at home and resents his mother's decision. He could not understand; simply, he could not forgive.

Forgiveness is always a great topic to discuss, a noble theme to preach, a moving piece to hear...until the challenge is right there inside our own homes. In this beautiful passage, Jesus situates betrayal, forgiveness and resentment within the context of family. Families are always places for injuries and forgiveness. It is not easy to forgive and not easy to be unforgiving in our families, where relationships are so close and ever so complex.

In the closeness of the family, many times, it is very difficult to live the new life Jesus shows his disciples. Adultery, physical abuse, deception, drugs, abandonment, emotional and physical attacks – these produce in us lasting scars and endless tears. Sometimes it is only at the occasion of death that we can pronounce our "I'm sorry" and "I forgive you".

And yet, let us revisit the story of Jesus and see what he really invites us to do. Look at the father, who with open arms, receives his wayward son. He does not ask any questions, nor does he start blaming. He simply rejoices. Look at this man and see how forgiveness can bring back joy into life. Do you remember a single moment when your life was flooded with joy simple because you chose to forgive than to repent?

Look at the prodigal son, the young man who was once proud. How, he can only classify himself with the servants. It must have been difficult to admit his fault and ask forgiveness. But only forgiveness gave him hope. Repentant and sincere, he regained everything he lost. Do you remember a time in your life when you swallowed your pride and decided to return to the heart of your family? What release and freedom did you feel when you finally approached another person you hurt so badly?

But sometimes it is easy to ask forgiveness than to forgive. Look at the older son. He is like me and you. We know we must forgive but we struggle with it. We want people to suffer before they can be received back into the fold. We should not withhold our forgiveness to those who have hurt us.

Jesus tells us that only forgiveness heals. It's not easy but it certainly is better to forgive and be forgiven, to be free to heal our hearts and the world again.