

# The Grace to Forgive

20 February, 2021

St Luke's

Reading: Luke 6:27-38

God wants you to have a fulfilling, happy and abundant life. I say that because the attitude we have when approaching today's reading is important.

Jesus says (in the Message version):

"Here's what I propose. Don't hit back. If someone wants your shirt, then gift wrap your coat. You know the old law. Let your enemies bring out the best in you, not the worst. In a word I'm saying grow up; live generously and graciously."

Live graciously.

In one parish, because people seemed to be getting grumpy, we had a year of grace, and this reading is about living graciously. As it says in the Gospel of John, "Through Moses we get the law, but grace came with Jesus Christ."

The old law was a big improvement on what went before. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth limited the revenge gene, the want to get even in us. But in the end getting payback becomes destructive. Let me give you an example.

At the height of the cold war the superpowers had a doctrine of what they called Mutually Assured Destruction, or M.A.D. Mad! It was the eye for an eye principle gone ballistic. If the Soviet Union launched a missile, then America would respond in kind. If the Americans did this, then the Soviets would send another and so on until the whole world was destroyed by nuclear war. How any of us got any sleep, I don't know!

"An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth and the whole world ends up blind," said Martin Luther King.

Jesus turns the world upside down with his radical teaching. No longer are we to take revenge. But we are to seek the best for our enemies; in effect, we are to love them.

But do we feel better when we get our own back? Why don't we feel better if we get our own back?

Debbie Morris when she was just 16 was raped and brutalised, held for 12 hours and left for dead. Her boyfriend was killed in front of her. Her attacker was caught and put on death row, sentenced to be put to death. For years this felt like justice. Debbie waited with great expectation for the moment her rapist was to be put to death. That day came but strangely she felt no better. In fact, she began to feel worse. She suffered from depression, and nothing seemed to help. About 5 years later she was praying, and she realised, that in order for her to move on, she needed to forgive the man. He had completely ruined her

life, but as long as she played the victim, as long as she was unforgiving, he still had power over her. In a moment of blinding realisation, she knew he could have been put to death 500 times and it would never help her. What she needed was forgiveness. It sure was hard, but she embarked instead on a journey of forgiveness. Her family urging her otherwise. The more she forgave, the more she set herself free. Forgiveness was the key, she discovered, to liberating her own life. Today she has completely forgiven the man, and she tours her country teaching others about the power of Christian forgiveness. If you asked Debbie "Was it an easy journey?" she would say, "No!" If you asked, "Was it a necessary journey?" she would say "Yes!"

You see God wants us to have fulfilling happy lives, that is why Jesus taught forgiveness. A book on my bookshelf by Desmond Tutu is titled, *No Future Without Forgiveness*. Whether it is an individual or a nation this is the truth. Forgiveness sets us free.

Walking the extra mile, turning the other cheek, loving our enemies. All this is impossible without God's grace, but with grace all things are possible. Even the setting free of a soul from bitterness.

This sort of extra-ordinary grace is only possible as we build up grace in our hearts. It's a bit like physical training: we start off slow and only after much training can we take on the Coast to Coast. We need grace training too. Start with practicing on your spouse or your kids, or that person at work that really gets up your nose. Practice at church. Slowly as we build up, we are becoming more and more Christlike ourselves. Don't give up, pray for grace. In our ordinary everyday life, we experience it so often from others.

I was at the dentist which is not usually a very grace filled occasion! The double pain - the drill and then the bill! In the waiting room was a former student of mine from the polytech. She yelled out to me, "Nick so great to see you. You were a brilliant tutor". She said it in front of everyone else. I felt 10 feet tall! What a grace-full thing to say.

I like this 17<sup>th</sup> century nun's prayer for grace. Let's make it ours too.

### **Seventeenth Century Nun's Prayer**

Lord, You know better than I know myself that I am growing older and will someday be old. Keep me from the fatal habit of thinking I must say something on every subject and on every occasion. Release me from the craving to straighten out everybody's affairs. Make me thoughtful, but not moody. Helpful, but not bossy. With my vast store of wisdom, it seems a pity not to use it all, but You know, Lord, I want a few friends at the end.

Keep my mind free from the endless recital of details; give me wings to get to the point. Seal my lips on my aches and pains. They are increasing, and love of rehearsing them is becoming sweeter as the years go by. I dare not ask for grace enough to enjoy the tales of others' pains, but help me to endure them with patience.

I dare not ask for improved memory, but for a growing humility and a lessening

cocksureness when my memory seems to clash with the memories of others. Teach me the glorious lesson that occasionally, I may be mistaken.

Keep me reasonably sweet. I do not want to be a saint - but a sour old person is one of the crowning works of the devil. Give me the ability to see good things in unexpected places, and talents in unexpected people. And give me, Lord, the grace to tell them so.

Amen