

Third Sunday of Easter – 2012

You may have noticed a recurrent theme found in each of today's readings: the FORGIVENESS of sins ...In the 1st reading Peter is speaking to the people who had rejected Jesus and allowed Him to be put death, and he exhorts them: "Repent so that your sins may be wiped away."...In our 2nd reading John reminds us that Jesus took the punishment for the sins of the whole world...and in the Gospel, the Risen Jesus tells His astonished disciples that repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached in his name to all the nations...FORGIVENESS! That was the purpose of Jesus' death and resurrection...FORGIVENESS! That's what's available to every man, woman and child because of what Jesus did.... FORGIVENESS! That's the gift God offers us so that we can live in a different way than we might otherwise be living...so that we can live life as God has meant us to live!...We can start living a FORGIVEN life...a FORGIVEN life!...Just what does that mean?...We'll get back to that in a minute.

In today's Gospel, the two disciples who had encountered Jesus on the road to Emmaeus are going on and on to the other disciples about their encounter with the risen Christ,...when suddenly the Lord himself appears to the whole group. They are shocked and amazed...They think it's a ghost!...So Jesus lets them see the nail marks, and eats a piece of fish to prove that it really is Him – in the flesh...Then He tells them something very important....He tells them that everything that happened to Him – from his birth, to his death, to his rising from the tomb – happened to fulfill the promises God had made to the world as recorded in the Sacred Scriptures....promises God made to redeem the world when the world had decided to walk away from God...Jesus sums up the promises for His disciples....*A Messiah will be sent.... He will suffer and die for the sins of the world...On the third day, He will be raised from the dead and forgiveness will be offered to all people!*.. During his three years with them, Jesus had told His disciples more than once that all this would happen, and they never quite got it....But when it all happened as the Bible and Jesus said it would, they finally did get it,...and they also got a mission: ...to go into the entire world as His representatives to tell people all that Christ had done, so that they would repent and be forgiven,...so that they would live forgiven lives,...so that WE could live forgiven lives...Now, what does this mean?

Here's an example...About 25 yrs ago, our parish had a series of "Come Back Home" meetings for people who had been away from the Church...I remember an elderly man – Armando - came to talk to me...He had been a faithful churchgoer for the first 60 years of his life, but he hadn't been to Mass for the last 20 years because of a serious disagreement he had with the pastor of his parish...He had gotten so angry that he abandoned the Catholic faith and the Sacraments that meant so much to him. ...He told me there had been many times over those 20 yrs that he thought about coming back, but he had been hurt too much, and he couldn't get past that hurt., ...until he saw our invitation in the Catholic Courier...Then, as he talked, he got a little teary-eyed and admitted that as he was getting close to the end of his life he knew he had to get right with God...He had to get back to his church, but he was very anxious because he knew he couldn't receive Christ in the Eucharist without first going to confession. ...He had 20 yrs of sins to confess,...and he worried about what kind of penance the priest would give him for missing 20 years of Mass, not to mention all the other sins he needed God to forgive.

Well, long story short, I helped ease Armando's anxiety by assuring him that the priest had heard confessions much worse than his,...and would be very happy to welcome Armando back into the fold. ...I was with Armando when he made his first confession in 20 yrs,...and I can still see the ear-to-ear smile he wore when he came out of the confessional...He had walked in with his head down and shoulders sagging like he was going to the gallows,...but he walked out with head high and shoulders erect, as if a tremendous load had been lifted...because the priest had pronounced him FORGIVEN!....Armando knew he was FORGIVEN!...It was like a new begin-

ning for him...The old had been wiped away....The new had come...The slate was clean. Armando could start his life all over again – at 80-something years of age...A new life...a *forgiven life*...Armando died a short time later.

You see, to live a *forgiven life* means to accept the gift of starting your life all over again no matter what you've done,...no matter how old you are,...no matter what opportunities you squandered, ...no matter how you may have wasted your life up until now.

Have you ever thought this: *Gee, if I could go back and live my life over, I'd do a lot of things differently*?...I'll bet many of us have. I know I have...Number One on my list of do-overs: I'd stop acting like the Manager of the Universe,...you know, always trying to handle everything myself. ...relying on my own smarts and strength to deal with problems and troubles...convinced that I have to be able to fix everything...make it better...whether it's my own issue or one of my kids...or someone else I think is depending on me to set everything right...Can any of you identify with that?...Any other Managers of the Universe out there?... Have you learned what I have learned,...that when we depend only on our own strength and smarts, we eventually find we can't fix everything?...Actually we can't fix much...Our child rejects the Catholic faith ...We can't fix it...Our spouse decides our marriage is over...We can't fix it... The stock market and our retirement pension go into the tank...We can't fix it...A boss comes along who doesn't care how long we've been with the company, and we are let go. ...We can't fix it...The doctors say there's nothing more they can do ...and we can't fix it...Our parents decide they no longer want to be married...and we can't fix it...There's not very much we can do...on our own.

Many of us have heard the saying: *God helps those who help themselves*. Right? Well, guess what? That's not in the Bible...What IS in the Bible is Jesus saying, "Your heavenly Father knows what you need....He will take care of it...so don't get stressed out."...What IS in the Bible are the reassuring words from the Book of Proverbs: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart,...and He will direct your paths." ...What IS in the Bible is God telling us in Isa 41: "Do not fear, for I am your God...I will strengthen you and help you and hold you up with my right hand." I'm convinced that the sin that we most often fall into is sin against the First Commandment when we put ourselves on the throne, and we won't let God take His rightful seat on the throne and be the God of our lives...My friends,...God helps those who let Him become the Lord of their lives. ...There are some things only God can do...and the sooner we admit that and trust that He will direct our path and give us what we need to follow His path,...the better off we will be.

Yes, if I could do one thing over in my life it would be to trust God more...and let God be God...Now, there are many other things I'd like to do over...How about you?...Well, the Good News of Easter is **we have another chance!**...That's what it means to be forgiven...Through the loving sacrifice and glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ, the power of even the worst decisions and worst screw-ups in our lives has been broken....The old has been wiped away. ...The new has come....the slate is clean...and we are free to begin again....That's what it means to live a *forgiven life*...But, there's a catch...There's always a catch....The forgiven life – the gift of being able to start over – can't start until we *repent*, until we make a commitment to change. ...to turn away from our old ways and turn to God...The first words Jesus preached in the Gospels were:"REPENT, for the Kingdom of God is at hand."...And in today's Gospel we heard the Risen Jesus' parting words commissioning His disciples to preach *repentance for the forgiveness of sins to all nations*. So we can see how important repentance is to Jesus, to God.

A religion teacher once asked her class what the word "repentance" meant, and a little boy answered, " It's being sorry for your sins."...A little girl then raised her hand and said,.. "No, it's being sorry enough so you won't do it again." Very wise little girl...Just saying, "Lord, I'm sorry, now let me get on with my life," doesn't cut it...Forgiveness requires *repentance* – an admission

of our sin,...a feeling of sadness that our sin put Jesus on the cross,...and a promise to do our best – with God's help – to use the gift of God's forgiveness not only to begin again,...but to stay the course...to live a *forgiven life!*

In a few moments, a mystery that we will never understand, will unfold on this altar,...as the suffering, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ - events that took place over 2000 years ago - become present to us as if they were happening for the first time...and their saving power offers us God's gift of forgiveness once again...So come and receive a brand new beginning...a new life...raised up out of the old...*a forgiven life. AMEN!*