

# FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES

Mt 6:12, 14-5; Ps 51:1-12; Ps 103:8; Hos 2:19; Mic 6:8

## I. ASSUMING A MERCIFUL GOD, GIVEN TO FORGIVING

- A. Scriptures assure us—Ps 51:1; Ps 103:8; Hos 2:19
- B. Jesus came as the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world” (Jn 1:29) and often forgave sinners (Mt 9:1-8; Mk 2:1-12)—a clear, remarkable mark of his divinity
- C. Witnesses celebrate
  - 1. “Among the attributes of God, although they are all equal, mercy shines with even more brilliancy than justice” (Miguel de Cervantes).
  - 2. “There’s a wideness in God’s mercy / Lake the wideness of the sea;  
There’s a kindness in His justice / Which is more than liberty” (Frederick William Faber).
  - 3. “I say that we are wound / With mercy round and round / As if with air” (Gerard Manley Hopkins).
  - 4. “Being all fashioned of the self-same dust, / Let us be merciful as well as just” (Henry Wadsworth Longfellow).
  - 5. “The quality of mercy is not strain’d / It drops as the gentle rain from heaven / Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest, / It blesses him that gives and him that takes: / ’Tis mightiest in the mightiest: it becomes / The throned monarch better than his crown . . . / It is enthroned in the hearts of kings, / It is an attribute of God himself . . . “ (William Shakespeare: *The Merchant of Venice*).
- D. Historical Illustrations of human mercy—Clemenceau; Coolidge; M.L. King; Dick Gregory
- E. Church history replete with illustrations of divine mercy

## II. CONFESSING THE SINFULNESS OF MAN—“LORD HAVE MERCY”

- A. Current discounting the reality of sin—especially evident in “self-esteem” rhetoric (schools & churches)
  - 1. “The real trouble with our times is not the multiplication of sinners, it is the disappearance of sin” (Etienne Gilson).
  - 2. Whatever Became of Sin?” (Karl Menenger).
- B. Original (Ancestral) Sin: “in Adam’s fall we sinned all”—“that sin and its guilt that we all possess in God’s eyes as a direct result of Adam’s sin in the Garden of Eden.”
  - 1. Biblical evidence: Ps 51:1-12
  - 2. Definitions/Descriptions: “privation of original righteousness,” “bent toward evil” (C.S. Lewis); “vandalism of shalom” (Cornelius Plantinga); “a prideful ‘rejection of objective moral truth’” (Plantinga); “failure to trust God” (Ted Peters)
  - 3. Evident in need for baptism, when considered a sacrament (most clearly stated in infant baptism)
  - 4. “All sin is a form of lying” (Augustine)—the devil is a “liar, and the beginning of it” (Jn 8:44)
  - 5. *People of the Lie* (Scott Peck)
- C. Personal (both actual and habitual) Sins; volitional, accountable—e.g. David’s affair with Bathsheba
  - 1. Hamartia—“missing the mark”—carelessness, poor preparation, indifference
  - 2. Hettoma—“diminishing what should have been given full measure”—finishing task, attaining end
  - 3. Paraptoma—“falling when one should have stood”—slipping through presumption, inattentiveness
  - 4. Agnoeema—“Ignorance when one should have known”—poor catechesis; sloppy reasoning
  - 5. Parakoe—“To refuse to hear and heed God’s word,” “disobedience”—flaunting truth, law
  - 6. Parabasis—“To intentionally cross a line”—ignoring boundaries, defying standards
  - 7. Anomia and Paranoia—“Lawlessness, or willfully breaking God’s written rules.”
- D. “Seven Deadly Sins”—listed by Gregory I (ca. 600 A.D.) & frequently seen as summation
  - 1. Pride—“the complete anti-God state of mind” (e.g. Louis XIV)
  - 2. Envy—“the most odious of vices” (e.g. Iago)
  - 3. Anger—“the anesthetic of the mind” (e.g. mother in C.S. Lewis’s *Great Divorce*)
  - 4. Lust—“perversions of the sex instinct are numerous” (e.g. Marquis de Sade)
  - 5. Gluttony—“her belly dominates her whole life” (obnoxious vegetarians)
  - 6. Sloth—“this made it hard to think” (e.g. “spirituality” of NONes)
  - 7. Avarice—“this itch to have things” (e.g. Scrooge in Dickens’ *Christmas Carol*)

## III. FORGIVING (FORGIVEN AS WE FORGIVE—OR HAVE FORGIVEN) OTHERS

- A. If we must ask God to forgive so as to be forgiven, must offenders confess to us before we forgive?
- B. Is our forgiveness from God conditional on our forgiving?

“ALMIGHTY and most merciful Father; / We have erred, and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep. / We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. / We have offended against thy holy laws. / We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; / And we have done those things which we ought not to have done; / And there is no health in us. / But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders. / Spare thou them, O God, which confess their faults. / Restore thou them that are penitent; According to thy promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesu our Lord. / And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake; / That we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, / To the glory of thy holy Name. Amen.” —Book of Common Prayer

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“Whoever has love in Christ shall keep Christ’s commandments. Who can describe the binding power of Christ’s love? Love covers a multitude of sins. . . . Love knows no separation, love does all things in harmony. In love all the elect have attained perfection, without love God is not pleased. In love our Lord accepted us; for the sake of the love he bore to us our Lord Jesus Christ gave his blood for us according to God’s will, his body for your body, his soul for our soul.—May our sins be forgiven us on account of love.” —Clement of Rome, ca. 100 A.D.

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“You are a man, and you like the people whom you are to forgive to beg your pardon, and yet you think God should forgive you without your praying for it.” —Ambrose

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“From this petition we learn that in this life man needs two things: One of them is always to act in fear and humility. For some people were so bold as to claim that man could live in this world and avoid sin by his own powers. But this is granted only to Christ, whose mind is immeasurable; and to the Holy Virgin, who was full of grace and without sin. . . . But for the other saints it was not made possible that they should not fall into venial sin. . . . And this is confirmed in the prayer, for it is proper for all men, saints too, to pray the ‘Our Father,’ with its Forgive us our trespasses. Thus all acknowledge and confess themselves sinners or trespassers. But if you are a sinner you must fear, and humble yourself.

“But the prayer lets hope grow in us too. . . . For Christ says: ‘I remitted all that of thine, at thy entreaty.’ Then on any day you make petition, you can obtain the mercy of God when you pray with remorse. Thus, fear and hope grow out of this petition, for all contrite and confessing sinners obtain mercy; but this petition is necessary on their accounts.” —Thomas Aquinas

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“This then, O my soul! is what the sinfulness of sin consists in. It is lifting my hand against my infinite Benefactor, against my almighty Creator, Preserver and Judge—against him in whom all majesty and glory and beauty and reverence and sanctity center; against the one and only God.

“O my God! I am utterly confounded to think of the state in which I lie! What will become of me if thou art severe? What is my life, O my dear and merciful Lord, but a series of offenses, little or great, against thee! O what great sins I have committed against thee before now—and how continually am I sinning in lesser matters. My God, what will become of me? What will be my position hereafter if I am left to myself! What can I do but come humbly to him whom I have so heavily affronted and insulted and beg him to forgive the debt which lies against me? O my Lord Jesus, whose love for me has been so great as to bring thee down from heaven to save me, teach me dear Lord, my sin—teach me its heinousness—teach me truly to repent of it—and pardon it in thy great mercy!

“I beg thee, O my dear Savior, to recover me! Thy grace alone can do it. I cannot save myself. I cannot recover my lost ground. I cannot turn to thee, I cannot please thee, or save my soul without thee. I shall go from bad to worse, I shall fall from thee entirely, I shall quite harden myself against my neglect of duty, if I rely on my own strength. I shall make myself the center instead of making thee. I shall worship some idol of my own framing instead of thee, the only true God and my Maker, unless thou under it by thy grace. O my dear Lord, hear me! I have lived long enough in this undecided, wavering, unsatisfactory state. I wish to be thy good servant. I wish to sin no more. Be gracious to me, and enable me to be what I know I ought to be.” —John Henry Cardinal Newman

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“The fifth petition of the ‘Our Father’ represents a culminating point not only in relation to the preaching of the gospel, but in the whole religious history of humanity. For it contains a two-fold teaching which neither pre-Christian paganism nor Judaism knew of. The petition for the forgiveness of sins, as such, reveals to us that a confession of sinfulness and the desire for God’s mercy are the foundations of a truly religious life. And the second clause in the petition, with its challenge to one’s own capacity for mercy and forgiveness, in intention and deed, towards fellow men, as a condition for the remission of sins, signifies the most intimate connection imaginable between religious and moral life, giving the latter the highest sanction it can have.” —Albert Ehrhard

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“Our guilt is, above all, guilt towards God; he lives among us and we do not follow him; we live in his presence and offend him; we daily betray him as he was once betrayed: that is our great guilt.”

—Reinhold Schneider