



St John's Cathedral 聖公會聖約翰座堂

Anglican Diocese of Hong Kong Island
Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui

Message of Hope: Forgiveness heals

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Hi! This is Dwight once again.

I can say that it was my mother, of blessed memory, who helped shaped my spiritual life at a very young age. You see, it was my mom, who taught me the Lord's Prayer.

I cannot recall now, what prompted her to take the conscious effort to teach me, but I think I was 5 years old then, when she asked me to pray with her the Lord's Prayer. And patiently, she coaxed me and taught me until I came to memorize it – over an extended period of time.

But did I understand it? No ... not then ... but I was happy to have memorized it. Do I understand it now ... partially ... as new meanings and insights unfold as I say it, in my private prayers or at the Eucharist or in some other occasions.

John Dominic Crossan, in the prologue to his book, *The Greatest Prayer*, says:

The Lord's Prayer is Christianity's greatest prayer. It is also Christianity's strangest prayer. It is prayed by all Christians, but it never mentions Christ. It is prayed in all churches, but it never mentions church. It is prayed on all Sundays, but it never mentions Sunday. It is called the "Lord's Prayer," but it never mentions "Lord."

It is prayed by fundamentalist Christians, but it never mentions the inspired inerrancy of the Bible, the virgin birth, the miracles, the atoning death, or bodily resurrection of Christ. It is prayed by evangelical Christians, but it never mentions the evangelium, or gospel. It is prayed by Pentecostal Christians, but it never mentions ecstasy or the Holy Spirit.

It is prayed by Congregational, Presbyterian, Episcopalian and Roman Catholic Christians, but it never mentions congregation, priest, bishop or pope. It is prayed by Christians who split from one another over this or that doctrine, but it never mentions a single one of those doctrines. It is prayed by Christians who focus on Christ's substitutionary sacrificial atonement for human sin, but it never mentions Christ, substitution, sacrifice, atonement or sin.

It is prayed by Christians ... who emphasize what it never mentions and also prayed by Christians who ignore what it does."

So what is it then?

Crossan suggests that it is "... a prayer from the heart of Judaism on the lips of Christianity for the conscience of the world." It is, "...a radical manifesto and a hymn of hope for all humanity in language addressed to all the earth."

What my mom focused on was the portion on forgiveness: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

Thus when we kids quarreled, as kids do, she always reminded us about forgiveness and not holding grudges against one another. And that we siblings must be the first to love each other and help each other and protect each other and respect each other.

And I see these in her dealings with her own siblings.

But for others, forgiveness does not come easily. Many hold grudges in their heart against somebody. Or carry painful memories that have not yet been processed. And the feeling of victimhood continues. Hence some feel there is no closure, because the person causing it may not have shown remorse or expressed how sorry s/he is and have not sought forgiveness. There are times we feel it is better to step back first and let the hurt fade before taking steps towards forgiveness and reconciliation. And if the pain and hurt is too deep, forgiveness seems to be humanly impossible.

I cannot blame them. After all, we are all somehow products of significant happy and painful memories of the past. Yet we are also products of our hopes and dreams. These are what draw us to move into the future.

Forgiveness does not negate justice. And justice is never about punishment nor is it about revenge. Justice is making things right. It may not be immediately forthcoming but justice heals. Revenge on the other hand is simply making things worst. Because revenge means trying to correct, or so we thought, one wrong with another wrong, hence creating a potential unending cycle of violence.

When Jesus told Peter, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven," or as some other ancient manuscript say, "Seventy-seven times" he was not making an impossible demand.

Jesus was referring to the boast made by Lamech in Genesis 4:23-24:

Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;
you wives of Lamech, hearken to what I say:
I have slain a man for wounding me,
a young man for striking me.
If Cain is avenged sevenfold,
truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold."

What Jesus wants is to reverse and put an end to senseless acts of violence and measureless revenge as enunciated by Lamech. What Jesus is saying, stop seeking revenge. Forgive.

So we can either be prisoners of our past or we can be active participants in the shaping of our future.

You see, forgiveness heals. Both the forgiven and the forgiver.