

Text: Mt 18:21-35

Title: "Forgive and Move On"

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In Northern Ireland, Catholics and Protestants had conflicts over the years. Even though they had the same Christian faith, they killed each other for many years. Recently they work on forgiving each other and moving on.

During the World War I and World War II German Christians fought British Christians and American Christians. Although these wars were mostly politically motivated, it is a sad fact that Christians killed other Christians.

I saw a belt buckle of a German soldier. It had a saying that goes, "Gott Ist Mit Uns," meaning, "God is with us." It sounds good. But it's actually selfish to believe that God takes sides with German soldiers only. God doesn't take sides with German Christians. God doesn't take sides with American Christians for that matter. God wants us to take sides with God. Likewise, God doesn't take sides with Democrats. God doesn't take sides with Republicans, either. God wants Republicans and Democrats to take sides with God who is working for justice and peace in the world.

Trying to use God's name for our selfish agendas is blasphemous and sacrilegious. We shouldn't use God for us. We should let God use us for God's good purposes. That's the Christian way.

In today's Bible text Peter said to Jesus, "If another member in the church sins against me, how many times should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus said, "Not seven times. But, I tell you, seventy-seven times or, in another version, seventy times seven." Jesus's point is "As God has forgiven your sins, you should also forgive people's sins."

Billy Graham and his wife, Ruth Graham had a long and successful marriage. One day a news reporter asked Ruth Graham whether she had ever considered divorcing her famous husband, Billy Graham. Ruth said, "Divorce? Never! Murder? Yes!" And then she said, "A good marriage is made up of two good forgivers."

Billy Graham and his wife Ruth had a daughter named, Ruth. She wrote a book titled, "Forgiving My Father and Forgiving Myself". She said that she felt abandoned by her world-famous father when she was a little girl. She said that even though she believed in Jesus, she needed to fill the void in her heart. To fill emptiness in her heart, she said she married four times.

Ruth confessed that she had a lot of forgiveness to do. She said that she had to forgive her father for making her feel abandoned because he travelled so much while she was growing up. She had to forgive God for not meeting her expectations. She was hoping that God would help her to have a successful marriage. But she divorced three times and married four times. So she was mad at God and she had to forgive God.

When she was asked which one was the hardest to forgive, Ruth said, "I was the hardest one to forgive because I made the same mistake over and over again." She also said that she had to ask forgiveness from people whom she had offended or hurt.

When someone offends us and hurts us, we feel angry and we want to get even with them. We may hold grudges for many years. But scientists say that holding grudges harms us more than it harms others. We may develop ulcers, high blood pressure, strokes, and heart attack for carrying grudges. So forgiveness is for our sake, not for others' sake.

As Ruth said, we may have to forgive God for letting all the bad things happen in our lives. We may have to forgive our parents, spouses or children for hurting us verbally, emotionally, even physically. If you are not ready to forgive them, however, don't force yourself to forgive. Trying to force yourself to forgive can be counter-productive. Let it be. Let Holy Spirit help you. Just remember that forgiveness is for your mental and physical help as well as for others. Forgiveness is freeing yourself from the shackles of hatred, anger, and resentment.

Some people may never ask for our forgiveness. Nonetheless, let us forgive them for our peace of mind and freedom from anger.

A Jewish rabbi arrived in the U.S. as an immigrant after the World War II. He said, "I had to forgive Hitler before I came to this new country. I didn't want to bring him with me to my new life in America."

As the saying goes, life is short. We'd better not waste our time and energy holding grudges against people who have hurt us in the past. Let us choose to forgive, let go and move on with a new chapter of our life. Jesus said, "Forgive and you will be forgiven." (Luke 6:37)

One last comment I would like to leave with you is, in addition to forgiving others, let us speak well of others. As the old saying goes, "If you can't say anything nice about other people, don't say anything at all." Last Sunday, Pope Francis pleaded to his followers, "Please, brothers and sisters, try hard not to gossip. Gossip destroys faith communities. Gossip hurts people like a knife. Gossip is worse than coronavirus. Gossip destroys our soul, our friendship, and our church."

In short, let's not use God for our selfish reasons. Instead, let us ask God to use us for God's good purposes. We are not perfect. We need forgiveness. Other people are not perfect. They need forgiveness. Let's try hard not to gossip. Gossip destroys our church. Let us build each other up, instead of tearing each other down. Let's us try to "speak the truth in love." Amen.