

2021 Good Friday

In 1991 Pietro Maso with three friends murdered his two parents in order to appropriate his share of the inheritance. He was 19. His two sisters Nadia and Laura were so shocked that they never thought they would be able to forgive him. I would like to speak a little about the forgiveness of sins today but first let us look a little at the Gospel.

“But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. He who saw it has borne witness - his testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth -- that you also may believe.” (Jn 19:34-35) Today, Good Friday, the Church traditionally does not celebrate the sacraments at all except the sacraments of Confession and of Anointing of the sick, because she is at the spiritual source of her life, the pierced Heart of Jesus. **And from this pierced Heart flows Blood and water.**

When John speaks of blood and water flowing out from the side of Jesus he wants the reader to know that Jesus was truly dead. But John the Evangelist also uses water and blood to allude to Baptism and the Eucharist. Thus, testifying to us that blood and water are flowing out of Jesus' side, he wishes to proclaim that the Heart of the Savior is the fountain of salvation for the whole world. **And one of the greatest effects of this salvation is forgiveness of our sins.**

We often emphasize that the blood and water symbolize the Eucharist and Baptism in the Church. However, in order to appreciate what the Evangelist is saying biblically it is good to reflect on the relationship of the blood and water to the sacraments in the opposite direction. In Baptism we are immersed in the Blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins, especially original sin. In the Eucharist we are daily cleansed from our smaller venial sins through the Blood of Jesus. By Confession we are cleansed by the blood of Jesus from every sin we repent of. Jesus wants the forgiveness of

sins through his Blood to become the experience of his mercy for every soul. He wishes to inundate the whole world with his Blood.

Each year on Good Friday, our monastic community gathers for a confession of faults and each monk, including the Abbot, hears these words spoken to him: “May the Passion of Christ grant you pardon for all you sins...” During this ceremony, I look intently at each monk who kneels before me and mentally smear off, wipe off, all his faults and sins that I may remember, whether against me or against the community. **I do this so that I may start anew in my relationship with him, giving my own heart a fresh start in the goodness and mercy of God and giving his heart the freedom to be innocent before me.** I describe this process not for any self-promotion, but to help us be enveloped by the Love of God that comes to us through the Passion of Jesus Christ.

When Jesus Christ wipes away our sins with his Precious Blood they are blotted out. They cease to exist! They are nowhere to be found! If you wish, not even God has a memory of them! Yet the effects of our sins need to be kept distinct from the guilt of our sins or the wound of our sins. The effects are like the scar of a wound, the wound is healed but the scar remains to remind us that there was once a bleeding wound there.

This truth of our faith is so very important today when family, community and even national wounds committed by our politicians seem to expand and perdure for decades of our life together with their effects. The way to deal with sins committed against us personally or to deal with our own personal sins, when forgiven by God in confession, is to do what God does. Don't recall them, **don't tally them up in your hard drive**, unless they help you to acquire a loving contrition of heart. The feelings, like scars, will remain or resurface, but look upon them in the context of the amazing love of God who “forgets” that you were guilty after you leave the Confessional! **This is to live in true freedom of heart, in**

the freedom of grace bought about by the Precious Blood of Christ shed for our sins.

“**Forgiveness of sins is directed to the evil committed**, not to the offender’s intentions which can never be fully know [even by the offender himself sometimes, influenced as he is by the mystery of evil.] In genuine forgiveness, I forgive the objective injury, intentionally inflicted. When I see that the injury came about unintentionally, it is more accurate to speak about *excusing* rather than *forgiving*. One excuses the innocent but forgives the guilty.”¹

On the other hand, the intensity of the injury can seem to last even after forgiveness is given. This is natural, but shouldn’t be confused with forgiveness. Feelings will also continue which we don’t want, but those are also like the scars of the wound and will go away in time as we soak them in the Blood of Jesus.

With the help of a priest who never gave up on him (Pietro Maso was once an altar boy and a seminarian), many years later he was able with the help of God to accomplish what was thought impossible. He was converted and then reconciled to his two sisters. After spending twenty-two as a prisoner, he was released in 2015. When Laura and Nadia could finally understand how their brother was attracted by the lure of evil and how that power exerted an influence upon him, and when they saw his own repentance and added to that their Christian faith, they were more readily able to forgive him.²

Today on this Good Friday, let us look upon the Pierced One, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Let us look upon the wound we have inflicted upon him and upon others and the injuries inflicted upon us by others and forgive them as God forgives them, by expiating them,

wiping them off our memory out of love of him who so readily forgives us our sins and feeds us with his precious Blood.

¹ Javier Schlatter, *Wounds in the Heart: The Healing Power of Forgiveness* (New Rochelle, NY: Scepter, 2015), 52.

² Ibid, 55.