Ordinary 11C 2013
Father Frank Matera
Why We Forgive

One of the most difficult lessons to learn in life is how to forgive others. Why it is so difficult, I do not know. Perhaps it has something to do with a sense that we have been offended, that we have been treated unfairly, that we have not been respected. Whatever it is, we often refuse to forgive others even when they ask for our forgiveness. Indeed, there is a perverse sense of enjoyment and power in withholding our forgiveness. And yet we know that this is contrary to who we are since God has forgiven our sins in Christ.

Forgiveness is the central theme in all of today's readings. In the first, we heard how God forgave the great king David after he had committed the sins of adultery and murder. In the responsorial psalm, we sang "Lord, forgive the wrong I have done." And in the gospel we just heard, Jesus says to the repentant woman, "Your sins are forgiven."

The mystery of our faith is this: God has graciously forgiven our sins through the death and resurrection of his Son. We did not merit this forgiveness. We could not earn this forgiveness. God has freely and graciously forgiven our sins in Christ. This is why Saint Paul writes in today second reading, "I live by faith in the Son of God; who has loved me and given himself up for me."

Consider Paul's words more carefully. He says *he lives by faith in the Son of God*. This means that he no longer puts his confidence in the good works he has done. He no longer boasts in what he has accomplished. He no longer claims that he has done anything that could earn his salvation; for he knows that he has been freely and graciously forgiven by God.

If we ask why Paul lives by faith in the Son of God, he answers in this way: *Jesus Christ loves me and gave his life for me*. Paul knows that it is not what he has done that matters, but what Christ has done for him. And what has Christ done? He has surrendered his life on the cross to free Paul from the power of sin.

All of us can say what Paul says: We live by faith in the Son of God because Christ has shown his love for each one of us by dying on the cross to forgive our sins. But if this is true, if God has forgiven us in Christ, then we ought to forgive one another. We ought to forgive those who have offended us. And if we do not, we should not recite the Lord's Prayer in which we say "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us."

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I highlight these words about forgiveness because this evening we are honoring the seniors of our parish who will graduate this month. In graduating from high school you will take a major step in your lives that brings you into the wider world of college and eventually the market place. As you take this step, you will face new challenges. One of the most difficult challenges will be living your faith in a world that has little sympathy for what you believe, a world that is often very unforgiving.

This is why it is so important for you to remember the central mystery of our faith which we celebrate this evening and every time we share in the Eucharist: namely, God has forgiven our sins in Christ. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, loved us to the point dying on the cross for us. If you remember this, all will be well no matter what happens. If you remember this, you will have learned the most important lesson of your faith. If you remember this you will learn to forgive others. Remember you faith, and God will bless and keep you in his protective care all the days of your life.