

**Ordinary 24C 2013**  
**Father Frank Matera**  
***Forgive Us Our Sins***

Every time we celebrate the Eucharist, we recite the Lord's Prayer: the Our Father. And toward the end of that prayer we say, *forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us*. In other words, we boldly ask God to forgive us in the same way we forgive those who offend us. This, of course, is a rather presumptuous prayer since it supposes we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. But if we haven't forgiven those who have sinned against us, and if we continue to pray this prayer, then we are asking God to treat us in the same unforgiving way we treat others.

All of us know how difficult it is to forgive, especially to forgive those nearest and dearest to us. One of the things we all do at one time or another is to nurture a grudge. Although others ask for our forgiveness, we refuse to extend it. Although others apologize to us, we refuse to forgive them. And yet we dare to say, *forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us*.

So what must we do if we want to pray Jesus' prayer, the Our Father, as we ought? How can we learn to pray the words *forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us* in a way that will bring us salvation rather than condemnation?

Today's gospel provides us with the example of Jesus who welcomed sinners and ate with them. When challenged by the religious leaders for welcoming and eating with sinners, Jesus responds with two parables that show God's love for those who have gone astray. Comparing God to a woman who searches the whole house for a single coin, Jesus says that God seeks out those who have gone astray so that no one—not even the most notorious sinner—will be lost. Comparing God to a shepherd who leaves his flock to search for the one sheep who has gone astray, Jesus says that God's love extends to all people, even to those who have sinned.

This does not mean that God overlooks sin. This does not mean that God prefers sinners to the righteous. This does not mean that God excuses evil. But it does mean that God's love always seeks out those who are lost.

Jesus was such an extraordinary example of God's love that even sinners came to listen to him. In hearing his voice, they heard God's offer of forgiveness. In witnessing his behavior, they saw the compassion of God for those who had gone astray. In Jesus' message about the kingdom of God they understood that God was offering them the grace of repentance. God was reaching out to them, and condemning them to Himself.

Jesus, like God, was more willing to forgive than to condemn. Jesus, like God, was more interested in calling sinners to repentance than in abandoning them. Jesus like God was calling those who had wandered afar to return to their Father's house.

Yes, it's always easier to hold a grudge than to forgive. Yes, it is always easier to remember how others have offended us than to forgive them. Yes, it is always easier to remember the hurt rather than to forgive. But if this is how we act, then we dare not pray the

Lord's Prayer, *forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us*. We dare not ask God to forgive us when we have refused to forgive others.

All of us have failed in this way, myself included. All of us have not heeded the prayer that we make, myself included. This is why today's gospel is so important. It reminds us that as individuals and as a community, Jesus calls us to forgive as he forgives, to seek out the lost and those who have gone astray so that we can reflect the forgiveness of God to the world.