

Prayer of the Day:

Father in heaven, do not look upon our sins or deny our prayers on account of them. We are neither worthy of the things for which we pray, nor have we deserved them, but we ask that You would give them to us by grace, for we daily sin much and deserve nothing but punishment. So we, too, will sincerely forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

TEXT: 5th Petition (NIV84)

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
Matthew 6:12

Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. Luke 11:2

Verse of the Day: The Fifth Petition

Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

What does this mean?

We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look upon our sins or because of them deny our prayers; for we are worthy of none of the things for which we ask, neither have we deserved them, but we ask that he would give them all to us by grace; for we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment. So we too will forgive from the heart and gladly do good to those who sin against us.

Sermon:

Earnest Hemingway begins the short story, "The Capital of the World" with these words as he introduces the audience to the main character Paco.

Madrid is full of boys named Paco, which is the diminutive of the name Francisco, and there is a Madrid joke about a father who came to Madrid and inserted an advertisement in the personal columns of *El Liberal* which said: "Paco meet me at the Hotel Montana noon Tuesday all is forgiven. Papa." and how a squadron of Guardia Civil had to be called out to disperse the eight hundred young men who answered the advertisement.

Hemingway intended to let us know that Paco is a fairly familiar name in Madrid, Spain, but perhaps he strikes at something far greater with this little joke. I find it less impressive that 800 Pacos showed up and far more astounding that 800 Pacos would show up all craving the forgiveness of an estranged father.

Sin at its consequences are all around us. Yes, as we confessed at the beginning of our service today, even raging within us, so it really is no wonder that as Jesus offers up His model prayer for us, we would hear the words, "*Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.*"

Do you know what I find even more astounding than the thought of 800 Pacos standing around the Hotel Montana? That it takes Jesus five petitions to get to these words. Alright, I suppose the first three petitions make a bit of sense as they drift into those positions but to place forgiveness after bread seems to miss the balance of spiritual and physical so regularly emphasized throughout the rest of the Bible. I appreciate Martin Chemnitz's words in this regard.

Because we by nature seek worldly goods, it is the will of God that the acknowledgment of His benefits should begin first in us as we receive earthly things and that through these we may meditate on the knowledge of God. Through this knowledge, we may grow to desire spiritual and heavenly blessings. ... Therefore the petition of bread is connected immediately to the petition for the remission of sins. They are knit together by the conjunction "and". This is to teach us to desire and care for those things that concern the eternal salvation of our souls with the same fervency of spirit that we desire and are naturally motivated to seek worldly goods. (The Lord's Prayer by Martin Chemnitz)

Ah, but now we begin to experience the pangs of guilt, do we not? Is the Church as well supported as the grocery store? Is the pew as frequented as the ball diamond? Do we crave the Supper of our Lord or

the Absolution with the same longing for the couch or our favorite chair after a long day's work? I know the answers in my own life and already Paul's groan begins to grow within me but before, I can utter a word, a second wave of God's Law hits within this petition.

Jesus asks for forgiveness in what at least at first, would seem to indicate a contract with God. "as we ... " "for we also forgive". But do we? You may simply be a far more forgiving person than I am, that's a real possibility, but when someone wrongs you, I mean really wrongs you, I'm not talking "oops, I bumped you and your drink spilled" but something that threatened your very being, insulted you down to your very core values. Do you also forgive? Or instead, is vengeance ours instead of the Lord's, do grudges get held onto with vise-like tightness, do we harbor and recall the offenses with great frequency and fire and cast people from our lives like toddlers throwing tantrums rather than Christians following Christ? Am I Joseph in our first lesson, or am I the unmerciful servant in our Gospel? There is no pride in knowing that if this petition were a contract, it would be one that was foolhardy for me to enter into. If God is going to forgive me in the same way that I forgive others, well the fires of hell will be hot and the torment eternal. There's Paul's groan, rising up again, "*What a wretched man I am, who will save me from this body of death*" (Romans 7:24)?

Of this sinking feeling of damnation Richard Lauersdorf writes, "What a motivator need is. Before we seek a doctor's help, we have to feel our sickness. Before we say 'help me' to anyone about anything, need has to press our nose to the floor. So also with our prayer to God for His forgiveness. Can it be that at times we slide over the word of this petition or speak them listlessly because we don't feel our pressing need? (As Luther Taught the Word of Truth p152)"

Ah, but the guilt of our own sin does all of that and more. My unforgiving attitude drops me to my knees and as I groan out in anguish, Paul also provides an answer. *Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord* (Romans 7:25)!

Yes, this is why Jesus had to come. Forgiveness, yours and mine, was on the forefront of the mind of God and not because we were great forgiving people, but for the exact opposite reason. He came because He knew the depth of my depravity and sin. He came to set me free. So with nails piercing his hands and feet, after being brutalized and beaten in ways that would have left a normal human being dead and defeated, while still facing the scorn and ridicule of his enemies, Jesus prays, "*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.* (Luke 23:34)" Perfect forgiveness when my own reaction would have been far from religious. Perfect forgiveness that becomes my own on the very cross which showcases it as His holy precious blood pays for my sinfulness in full. When my sin demands death He gives His life, He announces forgiveness to the unforgivable that I might be with Him for all eternity. The Empty tomb seals it to me even as the Spirit wings faith into my heart connecting me to Him forever.

Ah, and then something else happens. Knowing that I have a God who has forgiven me so much, as I peer at my family, friend, neighbor, and even enemies through the lens of the cross my hard and unforgiving heart begins to crack. If God would forgive me, even when my sin meant the very death of His Son, then perhaps I can strive to forgive others. Perhaps, I can release the vise-like grip I so often have on the sins others have committed against me knowing that the blood of Jesus covers those sins too.

And then dear friends, it's time to pray this prayer anew. *Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors* writes Matthew (6:12). *Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us* (Luke 11:2). This is no contract. They are statements of reality for in Christ it is what our Father in Heaven sees. Dear Lord forgive us ... because we in Christ Jesus, through faith in His forgiving work forgive our fellow human beings. And when I struggle, lead me to the font of forgiveness that strengthens my own even as it supplies Yours.

I know it was a joke, and never truly based in reality, but I wonder. I wonder what would happen if we dropped a line in the paper, "My child meet me at Church for worship. All is forgiven. Your Father in Heaven." 800 or not, may we pray the fifth petition all the more fervently because **FORGIVENESS CHANGES EVERYTHING**, dear friends. Amen!