

17 Sunday C

St. Patrick

July 24, 2022

Theme: The IOU of our sins' debt "nailed" to the cross, no need to bargain with God. We celebrate that forgiveness and then show it to others.

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During my 8 years of elementary school at Little Flower School in North Memphis, those 30 minutes on the playground each class day were the highlight of the school day. We squeezed as much fun in that half-hour as we could: non-stop energy—well, except at 12 noon. Everybody playing different games, Sister Loretta would ring the bell. Everyone froze and stood erect. We prayed the Angelus. After that, all of us would return to play non-stop. By the time we got back into the classroom—45 perspiring bodies in a room without air conditioning—it made the classroom smell like a sour tennis shoe.

Still, we lived for those playground interludes. In the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, shortly after the class returned from bathroom break, Sister Amadeus solemnly reported that a student had written on the bathroom wall. No one had been caught "red-handed"; so, the teacher announced, no one in the class would be going out to the playground for the next three days.

Red-faced, I blurted out from my desk: "That's not fair! All of us shouldn't be punished!" However, a girl in the class calmly raised her hand. When Sister Amadeus acknowledged her, she said: "Sister, it must have been done in the boys' restroom, so why can't the girls go out for recess?" *They* got off.

Clever bargaining. That girl in my class must have taken lessons from Abraham. In today's first reading, responding to the prospect of Sodom's destruction by God, Abraham said:

**"God, will you sweep away the innocent with the guilty? Suppose there were 50 innocent people in the city...far be it from you to do such a thing!"**

Then, with the finesse of a diplomat outsmarting her opponent, Abraham bargained with his God...from 50 to 45, all the way to simply ten. The Book of Genesis calls Abraham "**the friend of God,**" and in that closeness he could have such an intimate back-and-forth with his God.

In our bargaining with God, what do we bring to the bargaining table?

One of the most famous “God-bargainers” was Danny Thomas. A young entertainer with his career going nowhere, he told God that, if his career succeeds, he would build a shrine to St. Jude, patron of hopeless cases. Now, we have St. Jude Hospital because that bargaining paid off.

Have you ever made a bargain with God? “You do this for me, God, and I’ll do that...”

Bluntly, St. Patrick’s, our faith tells us we can bring nothing to the bargaining table to make our case before God. None of our good deeds—nothing.

The Letter to the Colossians—our second reading this Sunday—puts it differently as we come to the bargaining table. It talks about our IOU, our “promissory note,” that is, the debts that we have incurred with God due to our sins. It’s right there, the hand-written note laying on the bargaining table in all its bluntness—this IOU to God. God’s Word teaches us, however, that because of Jesus’ death and resurrection, God has “**forgiven all our trespasses, nailing that ‘promissory note’ to the cross**”, as the Apostle Paul put it plainly.

No need, then, to bargain shrewdly with our God, as did Abraham. No, Jesus teaches us how to pray...making the simple petition in the “Our Father”: “**Forgive us our sins.**” You see, the IOU, the promissory note, has been nailed to the tree of the cross, with “**all our trespasses forgiven.**” What a liberating teaching!

But, then, God puts down the *one non-negotiable* at the bargaining table: “**Forgive us our sins for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.**” We’re forgiven—fully and forever—only to the extent that, from the heart, we forgive those who have sinned against us.

Friends: We celebrate that Jesus, our Savior, has won our freedom. We don’t need to bring anything to the bargaining table. Well, except for one thing: We need to forgive all who have offended us. Can we make that deal with our God?

### *General Intercessions*

*July 24, 2022*

*17<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time*

**Grace us, the Church, to truly celebrate the forgiveness you have granted us in Jesus, and show that same mercy with one another; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Free within us all that keeps us from living the Gospel with joy, and sharing the Gospel in love; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Heal all racial and ethnic hatred within our nation and world; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Help us to secure the dignity and rights of children, those with disabilities, and those who are mentally ill; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Embrace with your abiding love all who have died, especially Reverend Autura Eason Williams, and all who have been killed by violence (*and for the 11:00 a.m. Mass only--*), as well as for Francis Joseph Ippolito, on the first anniversary of his death; we pray to you, O Lord—**