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July 10-14 – Synod/Clericus 2023



BISHOP'S CORNER

From Bishop Vince's Desk

Observations & Insights on Forgiveness #1

Greetings in His Holy Graces, Beloveds of God

It is my intent and desire to begin a weekly series of articles on “forgiveness and forgetting.” Is forgetting past offences against us really required in authentic forgiveness in order for us to be forgiven by God of our offenses against Him?

Is it really possible to forget an offense against you that you do not hold it against the offender in your dealings and interactions with them? This seems to be the implication of verses like Isaiah 43:25: “*I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.*” Or Hebrews 8:12: “*For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.*”

The Holy Scriptures often speaks of the Almighty God remembering or not remembering, but not in the same way we talk about remembering to get the mail or forgetting a doctor's appointment. When God remembers, He responds. The Hebrew word *zakar* does not imply that God forgot and then suddenly remembered, but that He called something to mind. To remember in this sense is to act in accordance with something.

When God remembers people, plans, and promises, He works in a way that aligns with His faithfulness. He remembered Noah when He acted in accordance with the promise to protect his family (Gen. 8:1). He remembered Rachel in her barrenness and gave her a child according to His covenant to make Abraham's family a great nation (Gen. 30:22). God's people frequently call Him to remember them according to His steadfast love.

Likewise, the Almighty God ceasing to remember our sin is not voluntary amnesia. But, in His mercy, He does not act against us according to our sin. When the Lord forgives, He does not call our sins to mind to punish or berate us. He does not shake His head in disappointment as He whispers, “Shame on you.”

Instead, the Almighty God removes our sin from us as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12). “*I will remember their sins no more*” doesn't mean our sin slips His mind, but that He does not hold it against us (Hebrew 8:12). He treats us as if we never sinned. Selah!!

It is with the above as a backdrop, I have recently completed for the continual moment some personal scriptural research on the teachings of Yeshua about forgiveness. The intent was not to filter or dilute the revolutionary flavor of the teachings but to understand them within the comprehension context of the original audience. These teachings require an obedience beyond our human ability and standard as fallen humanity.

For me personally, my forgiveness does not necessary always include forgetting. Unfortunately, I tend to keep past offenses against me warm and alive to be resurrected or revisited later.

I am certain that this series may not be well received by some including me. I keep reminding myself, "The Truth and Truth alone will set you free!" Truth without my rationalizations or need for 'personal comfort interpretive interference' is what is required to truly struggle with Yeshua's teachings both in His Word and His behavior and apply them to our lives without caveats.

Let me begin with a remarkable intercession and example of the Lord Jesus Christ:

Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing." And the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice. (Luke 23:34 NLT)

Several years ago, whilst doing some post graduate studies, I had the distinct blessing and pleasure to attend a parish pastored by Pastor Chuck Swindoll. He is an incredible teacher, preacher, and writer. His devotional instructive writings are a part of my morning devotional routine. The story below was heard several years ago and recently recounted in a teaching by Pastor Chuck.

"This is a true story, told to me by a young seminary student I met years ago. I'll call him Aaron (not his real name).

Late one spring Aaron was praying about having a significant ministry the following summer. He asked God for a position to open up on some church staff or Christian organization. Nothing happened. Summer arrived, still nothing. Days turned into weeks, and Aaron finally faced reality—he needed any job he could find. He checked the want ads, and the only thing that seemed a possibility was driving a bus in the south side of Chicago . . . nothing to brag about, but it would help with tuition in the fall. After learning the route, he was on his own—a rookie driver in a dangerous section of the city. It wasn't long before Aaron realized just how dangerous his job really was.

A small gang of tough kids spotted the young driver and began to take advantage of him. For several mornings in a row, they got on, walked right past him without paying, ignored his warnings, and rode until they decided to get off . . . all the while making smart remarks to him and others on the bus. Finally, he decided that had gone on long enough.

The next morning, after the gang got on as usual, Aaron saw a policeman on the next corner, so he pulled over and reported the offense. The officer told them to pay or get off. They paid . . . but, unfortunately, the policeman got off. And they stayed on. When the bus turned another corner or two, the gang assaulted the young driver.

When he came to, blood was all over his shirt, two teeth were missing, both eyes were swollen, his money was gone, and the bus was empty. After returning to the terminal and being given the weekend off, our friend went to his little apartment, sank onto his bed, and stared at the ceiling in disbelief. Resentful thoughts swarmed his mind. Confusion, anger, and disillusionment added fuel to the fire of his physical pain. He spent a fitful night wrestling with his Lord.

How can this be? Where's God in all of this? I genuinely want to serve Him. I prayed for a ministry. I was willing to serve Him anywhere, doing anything . . . and this is the thanks I get!

On Monday morning, Aaron decided to press charges. With the help of the officer who had encountered the gang and several who were willing to testify as witnesses against the thugs, most of them were rounded up and taken to the local county jail. Within a few days, there was a hearing before the judge.

In walked Aaron and his attorney plus the angry gang members who glared across the room in his direction. Suddenly he was seized with a whole new series of thoughts. Not bitter ones but compassionate ones! His heart went out to the guys who had attacked him. Under the Spirit's control, he no longer hated them—he pitied them. They needed help, not more hate. What could he do? Or say?

Suddenly, after there had been a plea of guilty, Aaron (to the surprise of his attorney and everybody else in the courtroom) stood to his feet and requested permission to speak.

"Your honor, I would like you to total up all the days of punishment against these men—all the time sentenced against them—and I request that you allow me to go to jail in their place."

The judge didn't know whether to spit or wind his watch. Both attorneys were stunned. As Aaron looked over at the gang members (whose mouths and eyes looked like saucers), he smiled and said quietly, "It's because I forgive you."

The dumbfounded judge, when he reached a level of composure, said rather firmly: "Young man, you're out of order. This sort of thing has never been done before!" To which the young man replied with genius insight:

"Oh, yes, it has, your honor . . . yes, it has. It happened over nineteen centuries ago when a man from Galilee paid the penalty that all mankind deserved."

And then, for the next three or four minutes, without interruption, he explained how Jesus Christ died on our behalf, thereby proving God's love and forgiveness. He was not granted his request, but the young man visited the gang members in jail, led most of them to faith in Christ, and began a significant ministry to many others in south Chicago."

Of interest, I personally know this young man of God. He successfully completed his M.Div. and D.Min. and pastors a parish with a remarkable ministry among gangs. Two of the young men who assaulted him work as pastors in that ministry.

It is important to note that authentic forgiveness is not an elective in the curriculum of servanthood/discipleship to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a required course, and the exams are always tough to pass. Forgiveness is not a suggestion or a recommendation – it is a holy empirical mandate!

Next in the series is entitled, "*Bitterness & Unforgiveness is a Cancer in the Soul & Spirit*" taken from Matthew 18:21-35.

SAVE THE DATE

The National Church Synod and Clericus will be July 10-14 at the National Cathedral in Montecagle, Tn. The theme for the Clericus is “Living Out our Faith in Challenging Times”. The Synod will work on a document on the use of social media by Clergy and other matters concerning the Constitution and Bylaws. Registration form is are attached.



FROM FR. WARREN SHAW

To My Jewish Friends

I cannot overestimate the debt my religion owes to yours.

Jesus was, of course, a Jew, born in Israel of the tribe of Judah. He was circumcised on the eighth day, and St. Luke tells of his Bar Mitzvah at the age of twelve, where the elders “were amazed at his understanding and answers.” The original twelve apostles were all Israeli Jews. The first apostle not born in Israel was St. Paul, who was also Jewish.

All the books of our Bible, with the exception of Luke and Acts, were written by Jews. It was that firm foundation in Jewish theology and history that kept the church from falling into the prevailing religion of the Greco-Roman culture as it spread into the Gentile world,

That religion, labeled “heresy” by ancient Christian theologians, is called Gnosticism, from the Greek word for knowledge. The Gnostic heresy has crept into most Protestant

denominations today and is once again the prevailing religion in the Western World.

Without going into details, the basic premise of Gnosticism is the fundamental incompatibility of spirit and matter. That premise is in direct conflict with the biblical doctrine of creation which posits matter as growing out of and serving spirit. The sacramental theology of the Catholic church is based on that shared doctrine.

Gnostics depend on the hidden knowledge of experts to know how to live and what to believe. That was the original sin in The Garden of Eden (eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil). It conflicts with our shared dependence on divine revelation for such knowledge.

Science and religion, like matter and spirit, are by no means incompatible, but modern Gnostics try to make them so in order to suppress our shared religious heritage.

As “people of the book” both Jews and Christians need to recognize the prevailing culture for what it is and call it out. Thanks to their Jewish background, the apostles and their successors were able to do that.

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FROM FR. VICTOR MORGAN

Grand Ole Opry celebrity Grandpa Jones used to do a skit in which he visits the home of a rich relative. During a tour of the house, the man points out a bed and says, “This bed goes back to Louis the 14th. To which, Grandpa responds, “That’s nothing, I’ve got one at the house that goes back to Sears on the 12th.”

King Charles III can go one better. He has a piece of furniture – the famed coronation chair – that goes back to Edward 1 (1239-1307). While this chair is sparsely used (the last time it was officially put into service was June 2, 1953, at the coronation of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II), nevertheless, it is an outward and visible sign of the continuity of the Royal Family.

Underneath it, at least at times of coronations, is a stone that adds to this continuity. Known as the Stone of Scone or Destiny, it is believed by some to be the very rock on which Jacob in the Bible rested his head when he had a vision of a ladder reaching up to heaven. I have no idea if that legend is true. If it isn’t, it ought to be!

I feel compelled to share my own encounter with the coronation chair. Back in the late 90s or early 2000s, I was in London and went to the Abby for an early morning service of Morning Prayer. When I arrived, a man was just opening the gate leading into building. He directed me to go on in and look for such-and-such a chapel.

It was still dark outside and only a few lights were on in the Abby. I had been to the Abby before, but never alone in that vast space. So, I made my way cautiously around monuments and tombs as I looked for the chapel.

I must have missed it because I found myself in the area where the coronation chair is located. Looking straight ahead at it, the temptation was too great, and I reached out and touched it. Apparently, it was monitored because an Abby clergyman quickly appeared and chastised me before directing me to the chapel where the service was to be held. Now, I understand the chair is surrounded by a Plexiglass shield . . . I guess to keep such miscreants as myself away from it.

The heartening thing about the coronation at which this chair plays such an important part is that it is done in the context of Christian worship. Holy Communion from the Book of Common Prayer is celebrated, and the new sovereign is presented a Bible accompanied by the words: “We present You with this Book, the most valuable thing that this World affords. Here is Wisdom; this is the Royal Law; these are the lively Oracles of God.”

A truth found in the coronation rite which extends beyond the shores of Great Britain is that earthly rulers, by whatever name they are called, serve under a higher authority. They are under-shepherds of God’s people, not gods.

How should Christians relate to those in authority and the political state? First, there should be the realization that both are part of God’s will and plan. An absence of leaders and structures leads not to human flourishing but to anarchy, a state where the weak go to the wall and there is no justice.

Secondly, Christians are called in scripture to pray for the state and those in authority. This includes bad leaders and well as good. In the case of the former -- bad ones – it might be that their hearts will be changed or, if they refuse, that their wicked plots might be brought to nought and ultimately that they may be replaced by someone who has a heart for what is good and true and just.

Finally, Christians are commanded to obey civil authorities . . . up to a point. That point ends when they command what God forbids or forbid what God demands. It is on such occasions, Peter’s words spoken to the authorities of his day must be invoked: “We must obey God rather than men.”

All eyes are on King Charles III, and rightly so, but may they be even more on the king who is the ultimate ruler of God’s people, Jesus.

We beseech thee also, so to direct and dispose the hearts of all Christian Rulers, that they may truly and impartially administer justice, to the punishment of wickedness and vice, and to the maintenance of thy true religion, and virtue. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer)

The Rev. Victor H. Morgan, is rector of St. Luke’s Episcopal Church, Blue Ridge.

FROM CANON TURNER

“Bishop Vince McLaughlin and Father Dan Lees will be heading to the Highlands in late May, the Adirondack Highlands in northern NYS that is. Canon Brian Turner’s late wife, Martha, will be interred in the Pottersville Cemetery near where Canon Brian’s parents, grandparents, and several generations of great grandparents are buried. Bishop Vince will lead the graveside ceremony with the assistance of Fr. Dan. The trio will also visit nearby Fort Ticonderoga where the Scottish 42nd Regiment of Foot, aka The Black Watch, distinguished itself in combat against French forces in the French and Indian War. Bishop Vince was a member of The Black Watch as a young man (but not when they fought the French 😊), and Canon Brian gave the blessing in Scottish Gaelic for a memorial cairn to The Black Watch at Fort Ticonderoga in 1997.”

Cheers, Brian+

EDITOR’S NOTE: Check out our new, improved, and still under construction website. Rectors, if your parish is not listed please send vitals to revljfigueroa@gmail.com

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