

## Forgiveness1

When Pope Francis threw open the Door of Mercy, December 8, 2015, he said, "*How much wrong we do to God when we speak of sins being punished by his judgment before we speak of their being forgiven by his mercy. Mercy comes before judgment, and God's judgment will always be in the light of his mercy*"—which is infinite!

We don't know what to do with "infinity," because *it* does something with us. Our human minds can't comprehend, or control the "infinite." This explains why our counting and calculating minds fall back on a manageable notion like judgment.

In fact, we seem to prefer it. In most sermons I've heard, when speaking about mercy the preacher quickly adds: "But of course God's mercy must always be tempered by his judgment!" Judgment is too often the final word, and so it remains in our memories, which naturally turn toward fear.

Unfortunately, the most common view of God's judgment is retributive justice [you get what you deserve], which appeals to us, rather than restorative justice, which is totally free, without charge or mortgage

God's freely given grace is a humiliation to us, because free gifts say nothing about us. Only the soul can understand grace. The ego does not know how to receive things freely, without mortgage - [no such thing as a free lunch]. It likes to be worthy and needs to understand in order to accept things as true. *Lord I'm not worthy!* God says I'm not asking you to be worthy – just are you willing to receive?

A reminder that forgiveness *can only be experienced*—because to speak of forgiveness is to speak of God; not what God does, but who God is. God is totally for. For what? For giving [forgiving]. God is totally and always self-giving.

I cannot *win or deserve* forgiveness. Forgiveness is *a gifted experience*; all we can do is receive it.

The Church has never professed belief in sin, but in the *forgiveness* of sin. To believe in sin is common – to believe in forgiveness is Christian; but it's hard to believe in forgiveness – perhaps it's only the forgiven who *believe* – like Magdalen and Peter.

Sin is pain, because we can do nothing about it. This is why it is good to speak of sin in the singular *sin not sins* – because it is singular! *There is just one radical sin.* What we call sins are symptoms. The sores that reveal the poison.

Sin is a disorder in me. I want order, because order is peace – disorder is pain. Disorder in me is division – dividing me from me, from others, from the creator, from the good things of creation.

Sin is forgiven, not when absolution is pronounced, but when I feel the need to celebrate the Sacrament [*to respond to Grace*] and do so. Healing is gradual; a sense of inner peace and calm slowly, but surely returning. Something we come to the Sacrament to celebrate.

Everyone is created as a God-chosen vehicle, where the Spirit can be seen to be active in creation. Jesus never decided to be or go anywhere – he was led by the Spirit; the Spirit he gave us so that we could pray *Our Father...*

God is literally all around me – believing this, we are the body of Christ. God is spirit, but has become God with skin in Jesus, who takes-on flesh and bone in us, through his Spirit, given to us. Which means, when we lean on one another, we are the body of Christ.

*Wherever you find love, join in the celebration; wherever you find love damaged, help repair it; wherever you find love missing – bring it with you!*

Why is there so much fear when we think about God and ourselves, and what is the final judgement?

The Gospel tells us that Jesus will be our judge – Jesus who literally died for us, to show how much we are loved. Why are we fearful of such a judge? Maybe it's because, if I were God, I wouldn't love me!

The reality is: we have *a Father who loves us - a Brother who dies for us, - and a Spirit within us who is this mutual love that is God, God's love life!* So much good is left undone because of our lack of courage to believe this?

Even when Jesus told us to pray *Our Father...* a prayer that takes us out of ourselves: *who art in heaven – hallowed be thy name* – note: we pray to *our* Father, not *my* Father. *God is asking me to Let myself be loved so that I can learn to love*

No one *finds* God in this life; it is for us *to be found* by God – *why were you hiding?* – Geneis.1. Come out and be seen, free of anything and anyone that would keep us from being found by God.

We become aware of God, already present, through *serving* rather than searching, because God is a serving God. We can't find God for ourselves – because we have already been found, by God. *We will come and make ourselves at home* – Jn.14.23.

Reward/punishment, good versus bad, has been the plot line of most novels, plays, operas, films, and wars. This is the only way that a mind, unrenewed by prayer and grace, can perceive reality.

As long as we remain inside a win-lose script, Christianity will continue to appeal to low-level and vindictive moralisms and myths (Star Wars being a most recent example) and never rise to the mystical surprise that Jesus offered us.

*Lord, take me where you want me to go – show me who you want me to see – tell me what you want me to say – and keep me out of your way!*

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**Fr Austin**