

Homily

17th Sunday OT – C

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
July 26-27, 2025

Gen 18: 20-32
Ps 138: 1-2, 2-3, 6-7, 7-8
Col 2: 12-14
Lk 11: 1-13

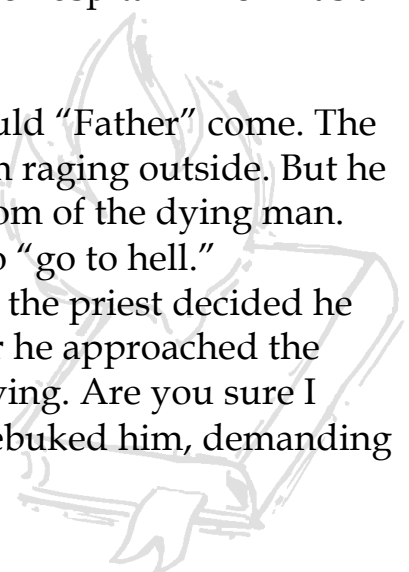


This story is taken from a book entitled
His Name is Mercy, Chapter 13, Forgiving
Yourself, under the subheading, His Mercy
Sets Us Free. Father Ken Barker writes,

This story is taken from Fr. Ken Barker's book, 'His Name is Mercy' (chapter 13, Forgiving Yourself; under the subheading, 'His Mercy sets us Free'):

"A true story of a man haunted by the past, whose life had been totally miserable due to the harrowing burden of guilt, was told by Sr. Anne Shields at a conference in Rome some years back. A priest in California was preparing to go to bed on a Sunday night after a busy day when the phone rang. It was a nurse at the hospital which was a couple of hours drive away.

A man was dying. He was a Catholic and would "Father" come. The priest was reluctant because there was a storm raging outside. But he decided to go. Upon arrival he entered the room of the dying man. He introduced himself and was gruffly told to "go to hell." The conditions of the storm had worsened, so the priest decided he would hang around for a while. An hour later he approached the man again. "I am a Catholic priest. You are dying. Are you sure I can't help you in any way?" Again the man rebuked him, demanding that he be left alone.



For some reason the priest decided he would try once more. He waited another hour. Then he entered the room for the last time. To his surprise the man responded, "Well, I may as well tell you." Then he began to relate the story of his life. Forty years previously he worked on a railway signals box. Everything was done manually in those days."

The conditions of the storm had worsened, so the priest decided he would hang around for a while. An hour later he approached the man again. "I am a Catholic priest. You are dying. Are you sure I can't help you in any way?" Again the man rebuked him, demanding that he be left alone.

The conditions of the storm had worsened, so the priest decided he would hang around for a while. An hour later he approached the man again. "I am a Catholic priest. You are dying. Are you sure I can't help you in any way?" Again the man rebuked him, demanding that he be left alone.

For some reason the priest decided he would try once more. He waited another hour. Then he entered the room for the last time. To his surprise the man responded, "Well, I may as well tell you." Then he began to relate the story of his life. Forty years previously he worked on a railway signals box. Everything was done manually in those days.

It was Christmas time, and he had been drinking. When the train was approaching he pulled the wrong lever. The train went down the wrong track and collided into a car as it was crossing the lines. A woman and her two children were killed instantly.

He told the priest that from that day onwards he had lived with the guilt of that accident. He kept to himself, never married, and gave up on life. He lived in quiet despair.

The priest, who had been listening very intently, asked him a few more questions about the date and time of the accident. Then he said to the dying man, "I want you to listen closely to me. You did not know this. But there was another little boy in that car. He lived. And when he grew up he became a priest. And he is speaking with you right now! And I want you to know, I forgive you."

That man, who had spent his whole life in such an awful prison of self-hate, guilt and self-recrimination, was able to hear from the priest the words of forgiveness that set him free.

He was finally able to forgive himself as he heard the words of absolution from the priest, but also the words of forgiveness from the little boy who had lost his mother and siblings in an accident 40 years previously. He died in peace...

Those of us who are dogged by feelings of anxiety and guilt about past sins need to learn to love ourselves. This comes in the light of God's great love for us. We must first believe He has forgiven us our sins when we have truly repented. He does not hold an accusing finger pointing towards us, nor has he been counting our faults with the intention of paying us back with future punishment.

Once we have repented we receive the free gift of His forgiveness. Basking in the sure knowledge of His unconditional love for us we can let go of the condemning attitude we have had toward ourselves. Looking into the merciful eyes of Jesus we find ourselves again."

So often in the confessional when people tell me their sins and are asking for forgiveness from God and the church, I always am obligated to give that forgiveness if a person truly is sorry. What I have come to

learn is that this is very difficult for a penitent to do because there is *one* individual who will not let this person forget about their sin... more often than not, this is the penitent; the person often cannot let go of the sin committed. For those who commit those really heinous sins (and sometimes for those who commit the same sin over and over), that stain of sin sticks with penitent for the rest of his or her life and the penitent cannot escape that “cage” that has bound that sin. That Satan has entered the sinner’s heart and will not allow the sinner to “let go and let God” is the burden that so many people face with so many past sins or transgressions in their respective lives.

I have heard and learned this lesson from so many individuals who are suffering and who really need that love and forgiveness. As a priest, I am honored that the sinner comes into the confessional seeking this cleansing and, on behalf of God and the community, I am most willing and happy to give it.

The problem for me is not us sharing God’s love. Often the problem is that the sinner receiving this grace because the sinner will not let go of

the sin and is buried in guilt because of the sin. For that reason, we have to understand the importance of reconciliation and the importance of God's forgiveness.

Unlike the confessional, people in the world often do not forgive and often will not forget. For God and the Church, though, the priest is able to do what society cannot – through the priest, God and the Church forgives and the person starts clean. If we priests are offering confession the correct way, we will always tell the forgiven sinner at the end of the confession, “We love you and we forgive you; we forget the sin and you start anew, you start clean.”

Whether a person accepts this forgiveness or not is hard to do. So many people who have had abortions in life, so many people that have murdered, so many people who have committed adultery or have done other terrible things in the past and who have been forgiven, sometimes just cannot let go. I understand the sentiment, because that stain of that sin in the world and the people that are affected are absolutely terrible.

Many of us, including myself, have done things that we regret. But

only until we let go, learn from our mistakes, and allow God to make us clean so we can become better people in the present will we be able to pass from this world into the next so God's love fills our hearts instead of anguish or hate or despair.

There are so many different saints and so many different philosophers who have told us about the stain of holding on to guilt, of holding on to hate instead of letting go and letting God – some of these saints have committed grave sins themselves prior or even after their conversion. In today's gospel, God is trying to teach us that if you are persistent, if you ask for God's love, then you are always going to get it. All you have to do is clean your heart and the rest is up to you.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, I can forgive your sins in the name of God and the community. As for the guilt of that sin, this is up to you. Sometimes I have to tell the sinner that the sinner needs to forgive themselves to get to the other side. We will help you in this journey but the forgiven sinner needs to let Christ will that person to the other side. All the forgiven sinner has to do is place the self in our Lord's

loving arms, ask for that forgiveness, and let God help. Let us help.

If you have problems in life, we have a 24-hour hotline you can call.

If you ever need to talk, feel free to call us. We have communion ministers. We have support counselors. We have all kinds of wonderful individuals that are willing to listen because that is what we are here to do. Please know we love you. We care for you. We want you to tell us your story and we want you to be able to forgive yourselves as God forgives you, God forgives me and for all who approach all people that we meet. This is our prayer.