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Dear Parishioners;

So today I thought that I would try and tie together the themes of entering into our season of Lent and the process of forgiveness. There are two statements of faith that I think can help us to understand who God is and who we are in God's eyes, so that our faith in a merciful God who has called us by name, will be the foundation of our lives.

The first is a line from psalm 130 that was offered at a recent mass in Lent, it went; *"If you O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, so that you may be revered."*

If you look up the meaning of the word revered it says; *"to feel deep respect or admiration for."* What I hear from this revelation from the ancient psalmist, is that God understands that if He is going to have a creative and sustained relationship with His imperfect creation, then God is going to have to provide for the possibility that we can be recreated or that we can be made new. Otherwise, over time there will be none of us left to know God, to love God and to serve God.

It is simple math really. God is a perfect being and so does not need anything from us. Which means that ultimately, we cannot disappoint God. Which is why someone much smarter than me was able to conclude that the only unforgiveable sin is the sin against the Holy Spirit. And that sin is a closed heart. If we believe that we, or anyone else, lives beyond God's mercy, then that is the one and only way that we can stem the flow of God's mercy.

I am not sure that after two thousands years of living in the Spirit, of having gained the wisdom and teaching of the Holy Spirit, that we would say that God wants to be revered. But we can say that God wants to have a relationship with us where we feel safe to open our hearts to God and find the truth that leads us to peace and a generous spirit. So that instead of revering God, we celebrate our belonging and our oneness in the Lord.

The ancient psalmists would say that a wise person should learn to fear God, and we would say that a saved person should fear a life without God.

God then is a constant source of compassion that we try to reflect into the lives that we share, rather than fearing that our next step is going to take us over the line from which we cannot retreat or ever be found.

The Church teaches that our sins are forgiven when we are sorry, because the sorrow is the proof that our hearts are open to the Lord. We may still feel guilty or shameful, but that guilt and shame are the proof that we would take it all back if we could, not that God is holding back God's grace.

And the second statement of faith is one we offer at every mass during what is called the Communion Rite that goes; *"Lord Jesus Christ, who said to your Apostles; Peace I leave you, my peace I give you, look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church, and graciously grant her peace and unity in accordance with your will..."*

Firstly, this statement of faith backs up what I said about God not needing anything from us. Jesus gives us His peace; we do not earn it. It is there for those who will seek, knock and ask. And with that confidence, we are able to ask the Lord to not look on our sins, or what is wanting in us, but to see what marks us as His very own, our faith, which is also God's gift.

So God is constant and it is us that are able to move, to choose, to heal and to grow. And all we need is to open our hearts and let the Holy Spirit lead us in the ways of peace. And when we find ourselves wanting to hide from the Lord or we try to appease God, then we know that we need to find a quiet place and just shut up and let the Spirit renew our humble and contrite hearts. And if we do that, then we will have a successful season of Lent, hearts that are ready to celebrate our salvation in Jesus at Easter.

I read this quote today from Lawrence S. Cunningham who teaches at Notre Dame University;

*"The humble heart, turned to God, is already at prayer before the first human word comes from our lips".*

May God be gracious to us and bless us, now and forever.

Pat Monette/Pastor