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## FORGIVENESS AND HOMECOMING

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At the beginning of Lent, 2000, the Church invites us to live this period in joy, prayer, fasting, and sharing. "Turn away from your sins and believe the Good News!" was the key message of the day which set us on the road to Easter. And Pope John Paul II specifically asked that these days be truly days of mutual forgiveness and reconciliation.

### WATCHFULNESS

Like a convalescent recovering from a bad bout of the flu, the sinner who acknowledges his sinfulness acknowledges also his great vulnerability and weakness. Just like the former flu sufferer who still feels in his whole body the different eventual attacks of harmless or sneaky viruses, the sincere sinner is quite aware of his weakness and fragility, echoing in this the feelings of Saint Paul who cried out, "I do the evil that I should not and do not do the good that I should!" Paul felt in himself not a morbid but a wholesome pulling apart which led him to declare, "It is in my weakness that I am strong." He knew that God's grace was sufficient to keep him faithful to the Word given.

### HARDNESS OF HEART

Whoever does not recognise his weaknesses risks becoming a terrible colleague or family member, a bad work mate or disagreeable life partner: a categorical, hurtful, inflexible, hard-hearted person with no compassion, using himself and his behaviour as sole criteria for what is to be. Such a person runs the risk of never understanding others and never having the least regard, humanity, or charity for them. In our times, such people are not rare: they contribute quite a bit to the escalation of violence in our society, because their rigidity exasperates those around him.

### A WISE PRAYER

In the immortal prayer attributed to St. Francis of Assisi and which starts with the words, "*Lord, make me a channel of your peace,*" the author, surely inspired by the Spirit, cries out: "*O Master, grant that I not seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love with all my soul, since it is in giving that we receive, in losing ourselves that we are found, in pardoning that we are pardoned.*" What a prayer of wisdom and goodness!

### "I DESIRE MERCY."

This prayer attributed to St. Francis points to the beautiful Gospel pages, especially those in Luke, which are filled with mercy and love: "*Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance. [Go and learn what it is to be merciful.] Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back*" (Lk. 5:31; 6:36-38).

## THE THREE PARABLES

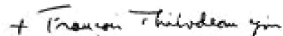
In these days of forgiveness, it would be very beneficial to read over the fifteenth chapter of St. Luke's Gospel, where we have three parables which reveal much about God. They are well-known parables, but what if they were to suddenly shed new light and take on a new life before and in you! Read about the lost sheep: the shepherd leaves behind the other 99 to go after the one hundredth... Read about the lost coin, about the woman who lost one of her coins and looks all over the house to find it... And the story of the son who has broken all ties with his father but who returns after having experienced inhuman conditions: *"My son was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found!"* (Luke 15:32b). And they began to celebrate.

## REACHING FOR FORGIVENESS

One of the main objectives of holy years and jubilees is to give everyone the opportunity of starting anew in life, of putting an end to a burdensome past, of forgetting past debts: they are times favourable to new beginnings, not to a useless, futile, sterile turning back, but to decisive and forward-going steps... Forgiving and being forgiven is like the act of breathing: breathe in, breathe out, two mutually responsive movements.

## WHAT IF IT WERE TODAY?

This is a favourable time for beginning anew: it is the Jubilee, it is Lent! Far from being a sad, sombre, depressing time, it is one of deep joy like that of the shepherd who found his sheep, the woman who found her missing coin, and the father whose son has returned. What if we ourselves were to discover what has been lacking the most in our lives: a tangible sign of God's Love, a personal, tangible sign... If we could only duplicate the experience of so many believers who have discovered the mercy of God... together we could cry out, *"His love is from age to age!"* May we be able, by our words and gestures of reconciliation, to say this in all truth!



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