

Forgive 70 x 7—How??? Wednesday, January 12, 2011 9:15 AM Morning
Enrichment COR Center

Today we are talking about the topic of forgiveness. Now **the topic of forgiveness rests on the universal experience of being offended**. Since the beginning of time, that is, human time, people have experienced being offended.

Now this is **both personal and collective**. For many centuries the collective side of this was even more important than the personal. Today we are very personal people. We are individuals. We live in a society as an individual. We think in terms of our own personal lives. But in the ancient world things were more collective, so we had tribes. The tribe was an organism, which had many members, but the organism itself was the tribe, not the individual. So **the collective mind of the tribe was basic to what the human mind was at that time**. Now human minds evolve. Everything evolves. Everything changes. There is tremendous potential in the human person; we don't even know what it is yet. But at one point the human mind was primarily tribal and collective.

Now in spite of the fact that the **tribal elements have disintegrated in modern times in the West, but still in the East**, in the Middle East in particular, tribal elements are still very powerful. And the experience of being offended in the tribe or the tribe being offended is still very prominent, or this could be shifted to the clan or the family. So this is a phenomenon that we have experienced, that people experience.

Perhaps the movement to the personal is actually a result of Christ himself. I believe **much of the development of the West, especially in terms of its more positive elements, is due to the fact that Christ personalized relationships and personalized religion**. But it was not always so. We should be able to see that things were different in a different time.

Now being offended includes two things. First of all, it includes **an actual injustice**, which of course happens. In terms of tribes and families it could be people's land being encroached upon. Here we have this land, and it is our land, and this is where we live, and this is what we plow, and this is our grazing land—and then now somebody else comes! That's an assault of a sort. So this is an issue; it's been an issue. But we also have **the perception of being offended**, which may or may not actually relate to any objective injustice. But it's just as important from a personal viewpoint. **So both have to be included when we deal with forgiveness**.

From another angle, being offended at what someone does—that is easy for us to understand. But there is also something else very prevalent, and that is **being offended by what people don't do**, and that especially applies to **our families** or those who are our caretakers or guardians or parents. We often are very offended by what they haven't done. We could call this **“feeling cheated.”** We could transfer that feeling cheated also to all kinds of **other institutions or authorities** who haven't cared for us, protected us, nurtured us, given us what we needed, and so on. So that's all included too.

Now in the beginning of human society there was **an attempt to regulate this feeling of being offended**, being cheated, and its corresponding desire for retaliation because apparently that is the natural human—I say natural not in the ordinary sense of natural—the **natural human response or reaction**, I should say, **is to retaliate**. They are encroaching on my land; I will push them out! They assaulted my daughter, well, go kill them! Retaliation—very common.

Now **law probably emerged in society as an attempt to bring some sort of order to this idea of retaliation**. And clearly **the covenant of Israel was an attempt to regulate this, to bring it under some sort of divine scrutiny**. “‘Vengeance is mine,’ saith the Lord” means that human vengeance is really not appropriate to human beings. Now by “human” I mean personal or family or tribal. No, vengeance now has to be determined by the covenant code. **Offenses have to be judged**. Why? They may be imaginary. Then there has to be meted out a certain sort of **whatever penalty; it has to be appropriate**.

Now if you look at the Old Testament, it’s all about this. What sort of penalty is appropriate for what sort of offense? And of course, there are **capital offenses**, which are what we today call the **“Ten Commandments.”** That has to do with ten areas for which there is no penalty except death itself. Now since this was believed to come from God it was not personal vengeance; it was the vengeance of Yahweh—that’s how they called it—the “vengeance of Yahweh.” So at least the Israelite group had this idea that this feeling of being offended is going to be **dealt with in a lawful manner through the laws of Israel**, promulgated by the priests, judged and enforced by the elders of the land, which meant all the male adults. So when the death penalty was determined as the appropriate penalty, all the elders had to participate; that’s why they had stoning. **Stoning was chosen because everyone could participate in it**. There was no executioner, but they were all executioners, and that was the idea.

Even into modern society, law continues to play this role of rationalizing, regulating, and controlling the desire for some sort of retaliation or retribution. **In modern society the form of retribution is most commonly money**. People want money for being offended. So we have this huge phenomenon of lawsuits. And many people are actually employed in this process of getting money from somebody for something. And **so even to this day private retaliation is illegal and forbidden**.

Now when we get to Jesus, we realize that he actually had a very deep and profound critique of this whole thing. This critique has not always been recognized in our history because of what happened in 313, when the Church was brought into some sort of an alliance with the empire. For 300 years the Church existed totally separate from the law. It was outlawed, but not only because it was outlawed, but because **Christ’s teachings were totally separate from the Law**. We see that at the beginning of the Christian period there were many Jewish people who became Christians, but who wanted to maintain their reliance on the Law, even though at that point and for a long time before that point, the matter had been highly compromised because of the presence of the Roman Empire in the land of Judea. Because of that the Jewish Law really was not enforceable. It hadn’t been for a long, long time, from the time of Alexander. So there

was little enforcement, but nonetheless, there were elements of Jewish Law that many Christian Jews tried to maintain. This led to a problem.

St. Paul became the great promoter of ending the relationship altogether with the Law. The problem, of course, in Paul's day was very simply the problem of: if you follow the Law, you can't join in the Eucharistic table with Gentiles, in which case you have two Churches, not one Church. St. Paul said, that's not acceptable, so we have to get rid of the Law. And because Paul did see that the whole Law was one whole thing, you couldn't really pick and choose.

However, after Constantine invited the bishops to become praetors of the Roman Empire and the Church became recognized and even honored in a political, secular sense, this detachment from law became blurred, and the **Church started taking on many elements of the Old Testament**, and especially honoring the law and honoring what the law did, and so on. The problem wasn't simply that it accepted it as a matter of fact, but it then became in a position to sanctify it, so to speak, baptize it, so to speak. Then **this led to serious compromises with Jesus' original teachings.**

But even before Constantine there was another problem that affected the attitude of the Church toward law, and that had to do with the **Gnostics**. The Gnostic people basically were not monotheists. In other words, regardless of whatever else they might have believed, good or bad, **they did not really believe there was one and only one God**, which the early Church obviously did believe. So when people said they were Christian Gnostics, the early Fathers said, "You can't be Christian. You are not monotheists." There is only one God. So there was an **emphasis then on the harmony between the New and the Old, an overemphasis in my judgment**—an overemphasis. The Gnostics, of course, wanted to abolish the Old altogether because they said the God of the Old Testament, so-called "Yahweh," was really an evil demiurge, not the true God. The true God is the Father of Jesus. Well, the Fathers said, "That's absolutely ridiculous." So in reacting to that **they went back too much, in my opinion too much, to the Old Testament** and to the validity of the Old Testament and to showing the harmony between the Old and the New, when in fact what is more striking is the contrast between the Old and the New. **So we have these two issues: the need to maintain harmony with the Old Testament insofar as it's monotheistic and insofar as Jesus was Jewish and did have a Jewish culture behind him, without which you can't understand even the New Testament. So that was one issue. Then you have the Roman Empire and that is another issue.**

So these things now have made things a little bit more difficult for us to understand, but **Jesus very clearly thought that the Law was simply no way to deal with anything.** So that's why he constantly had ways of saying things like this: "Well, 'The Law says to love your neighbor and hate your enemy,' but I say love your enemy. The Law says, 'Do not commit adultery,' but I say any man who looks lustfully at a woman is already an adulterer." So **he is moving everything inward and therefore away from Law.** His critique of the Old Testament or the old covenant or however you want to put this was "you wash the outside of the cup, but the inside remained dirty." So **he wants the inside of the heart to be cleansed of the poisons and mess that is in there, and**

among these primarily is the sense of unforgiveness and resentment and anger that can work as a poison.

Now we understand that **anger** is justified in the sense that God created everything and he created us with this emotion of anger; there must be a good purpose for it, and surely there is: **to attack true injustice, to motivate and empower us to oppose true injustice.** But psychologists have become very interested in forgiveness; from a practical viewpoint they realize, boy, if people can't find forgiveness, they are never going to be healthy. So from this very viewpoint they have studied the workings of anger in the human body, and they say that it really does turn into a poison after a certain length of time. It's not very long either. So, yes, we experience anger and, yes, it's correct that we do, but then we have to deal with that anger and use it somehow; let it empower us to do what it's supposed to do, not just let it seethe. **If it seethes inside, if it goes inside, it eats away, it poisons our inner nature.** So Jesus' view is we have to learn how to get rid of this anger, this resentment.

Now the rabbis correctly asked, "Who can forgive sin but God alone?" Well, that's a good question. That's not a smart-alecky question. They were not trying to be difficult when they asked that. When the men brought the sick man on the pallet, and Jesus says, "Your sins are forgiven; get up and walk," and they said, "Who can forgive sin but God alone," this is often represented to people as if they are being wise guys or asking some rather presumptuous question. It isn't. It's actually a wise question; **it's a good question: "Who can forgive sin but God alone?" Well, Jesus is claiming that God does want to forgive sin.** If you don't get that, you don't understand any of his teaching. He is speaking as one who knows the heart of the Father who is the Lawgiver. He knows what God really wants, and **what God really wants cannot even be expressed in law, however good law might be and useful in some way. But what he is talking about goes beyond that.**

So not only is **Jesus saying that God is offering forgiveness, but he is also demanding forgiveness.** These two go together and can't be separated, which is very hard on a lot of people. We don't grasp everything at once. A lot of us want forgiveness and need forgiveness at a stage in our lives where we are not really ready to give it. And that's okay; God accepts us as we are. But theoretically that's impossible. God offers and demands. And if you understand this a little bit, I believe that if we understand the whole idea of what I started with, a collective feeling of being offended, if we understand how a tribe or a family works: you hurt my daughter, therefore I will hurt you, well, now think of **God as the Father of everybody on earth who are now hurting each other, so he is offended by everybody!** He is simply offended by everybody's behavior toward each other.

From the Jewish point of view it was a legal offense matter; it wasn't really a being offended matter; **it wasn't that God felt offended,** but rather that, well, **the Law has been broken.** There is a big difference. If you go to court, is the judge personally upset by what you are accused of? I doubt it—only in the rarest cases where there is some sort of heinous crime, maybe. Maybe the judge is touched by the heinousness of the crime.

Ordinarily the judge doesn't care personally. He is there to decide whether the law has been broken and then what should be done about it.

But now Jesus says, no, God is not a judge worrying about whether the law is broken or not. **God is a Father who is offended by all this lousy behavior he is seeing in his children**, so he is offering forgiveness as a solution, as opposed to law, going beyond law—now forgiveness. It's like coming inward with purity instead of simply outward propriety, likewise instead of mere decorum, acceptance of people. Now he is saying, well, **God wants to come inward with forgiveness**, which is a matter of acceptance, but also acceptance with love. That's the key—**forgiveness is acceptance with love**. And love is a nurturing, healing energy, so that when God forgives, people are really changed. **And that's what Jesus constantly preached and practiced: the forgiveness that changed people.**

Now we see that some people didn't want this. They were people that thought already things were fine. Well, you know, those who think they are healthy do not need a doctor; Jesus observes this himself. So there were all kinds of people that were saying well, that's all for nothing; I don't care. But **the whole idea of Jesus' ministry is to those who are needy, who need forgiveness, who are sick, who need healing**. So he did not fulfill the purpose of directly transforming society, which actually the covenant of Sinai attempted. **Jesus really wasn't reforming society. He was helping people.** Now if enough people get helped, then the society will be changed of course, but that's his way: **one person at a time—from within to the outward, not from out in.**

Now along with this demand of forgiveness comes the word “**repentance**,” which is really a Greek word meaning “**change mind**,” **metanoia**, joint change of mind. In Modern Greek it's pronounced *metanoia*, but it doesn't mean this; it means a prostration. But the biblical word “metanoia” means “change of mind,” and it requires that we **are ready to change our beliefs**. This is of course what religious people often don't do. **Religious people** rejected Jesus because what he was saying wasn't what they believed, and we have to honor that too. We cannot accuse them of somehow being bad or whatever. **They were following the faith they had, and Jesus was disagreeing with it.** And the fact that they saw that was actually good. They at least saw that. Later on some of the Christians never saw it. They could not understand why the Jews didn't become Christians. Well, there was a good reason. It's called faith, just a different one. So **Jesus speaks a very unique doctrine**, very unique teaching, very unique ministry, very unique way, and its correctness or even its effectiveness is not something that's evident to the eyes. **It's all part of a search for God. It's a search for whatever we are here for—purpose.**

So **repentance involves a new attitude toward everything: I guess I have to let God lead me and teach me.** Among many things repentance involves **a desire to amend whatever isn't right in one's life**. That goes along with forgiveness. So if God is offering forgiveness but also demanding it, well, part of what he is demanding is that I am **willing to forgive everybody who has hurt me** since it goes hand in hand. **I can't accept forgiveness if I don't give it.** That's why he taught the *Lord's Prayer*: “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” In the Latin use the word

debita, which actually is a good point because the debts we hold are often not for offenses actually committed against us in an overt way, but they are debts we hold against people who haven't done what we thought they should have done. And I brought that up in the beginning, how **feeling cheated is part of what we need to forgive**, the people we think cheated us. Why? Because **resentment is a poison. It will eat away at us**. So if you really want to be free, everything has to go—all feelings of resentment, all feelings of habitual anger against certain people, whether they really did something or I thought they did something or they didn't do something I thought they should have done. That's the freedom that he is offering. It involves also that we are **willing to say we will try not to be offensive to other people**, since we can't actually ask for forgiveness for being offended if we are going to return and be offensive again. So that's the idea of **amending one's life, changing one's life. That's part of repentance, metanoia.**

All of this is **motivated only by love**, nothing else, not by a desire to be perfect, not by a desire to be admired, but by love, **love that comes from God, and a love for those that we have offended**. And, of course, from Jesus' point of view that should start with God the Father. We should start to **really be sorry**, and therefore that's remorse, **remorse for having offended God**—oh, and by the way, by offending somebody else! But the remorse starts with God who is love. That's where the offense really becomes prominent and where it really affects me personally in a deep and spiritual way. But then, by the way, how did I offend God? **I offended God by offending my neighbor** or my sister or my brother, my father, whatever, or by **holding people to requirements** they couldn't meet, and so on, or could have met but didn't. **But just holding them is hurting me too, so this is all part of letting go.**

Now in the many parables Jesus taught there was one very prominent one, which was the **parable of the Unforgiving Servant**. In this parable a servant owed his master a great deal of money and went to the master and the master said, "You pay what you owe." And he said "Well, I can't." And he said, "Okay, I'll forgive you." And then that servant went out and found another servant who owed far less and he throttled him and threw him in prison. The master heard about this through the other servants, of course, and was very angry and said, "I forgave you a huge amount. Should you not have forgiven your fellow servant a lesser amount?" Now that is a very important parable because when you think about it, **since God is love, God is really the one offended**. And since God is really the one offended and he is offering forgiveness, **shouldn't we also forgive those who owe us something, but much less than what we owe God?**

So then there is a very interesting ending to that. He is thrown into prison where he will stay until he pays "**the last penny**." What does that mean? Well, of course in prison you can't pay the last penny because you have nothing to pay with. But that's a way of saying that **we hold ourselves in the prison of unforgiveness**. When we are not forgiving, there is no hope. It's up to us. God offers this grace, and it is a grace; it is a power to forgive, to let go. And **it does involve trust and does involve a certain sort of humility, but it is something we have to choose**, and if we don't choose it, it's kind of hopeless. You will be in prison, the prison you made, forever. No one is going to spring you. It's up to you.

Now another wonderful story Jesus told is the **Prodigal Son**. In the Prodigal Son you see that the father is willing to take back the son who has wished him dead. That's really what it's about. Split the inheritance with me; I'm out of here! That's like saying I wish you were dead, then I would have my inheritance. The father takes him back. The elder brother does not take him back. This is a choice. But then the elder brother can't come into the party either. We will return to the Prodigal Son at the end.

Jesus stresses the need to forgive while going to court. He says, "While you are going to court with your opponent, settle." Why, **why settle on the way to court? Because you may lose the case.** You may not be right, so settle before you have to face that. He even says when people demand that you march—sometimes there was forced marching; there was, you might say, drafting into military service—he says **go farther than they demand. This is a changed attitude about the self and about life.** It's not normal. It's not even natural in the way we use the word "natural."

So in all these things **human life is really being elevated and transformed in a new dimension he calls the "kingdom of heaven" or the "kingdom of God."** In this new order **God is really the center, which is displacing the ego,** which had become the conscious center of human life in general. That evolved, you might say. Originally, apparently, in earliest tribes there was no ego in people. The tribe was the ego, if you want to call it that. The tribe was the center of awareness. **Gradually individuals took on egos, and this especially happened about six centuries before Christ.** It becomes very obvious in writings, for example, and promoted by religious leaders, including Hebrew prophets and Eastern mystics as well. They promoted the idea that you are after all an individual. So that idea got promoted. Now Jesus is transforming this so that really God becomes the center of our awareness. That's the kingdom of God. And then God is really the offended one, too, when it comes to injustice. But he doesn't want to retaliate because of love.

So in principle we need then to become forgiving not only in regard to personal offenses, not only in regard to overt attacks, but also all those things which we regret that people didn't do for us, all those things we feel were denied us, on a personal and on a collective level.

Now on a collective level, this is also something which is new, for example, if you listen sometimes to African Americans speak, they will talk about **the black experience,** when they mean the experience of Africans being brought to this country as slaves and then living as slaves and then being liberated, but not really elevated too much for a long time, and even now struggling. But now that experience and **that awareness is something new.** It didn't exist in Africa. **In Africa there were tribal mentalities.** Some tribes would take other tribes and sell them into slavery. They felt no compunction because that was a different tribe. See, both tribal awareness and personal awareness, which we call the ego, can set up boundaries that allow us some kind of immunity in regard to our actions toward others. This is what Jesus was completely rejecting. **You cannot be immune to what you do to other people whether collectively or personally.**

Question about slavery

It was accepted, although probably the American form was more cruel. Slavery existed throughout the world, yes, that's true. But that's not the point. The point is, what I was talking about is, how that affected people today. It's a new idea of the collective. It's a new idea. It was really Christianity that attacked the whole concept of slavery. **Among the more advanced Christians or the more aware Christians they always knew there was something wrong with this.**

So now **today we have new forms of collective awareness, the awareness of the immigrant, for example.** So it will be.

Now I think we have to make a **distinction between forgiveness and reconciliation.** Some people think they are the same thing, but they are really not. Reconciliation is a wonderful thing, but it's a two-way street. It requires people to cooperate. Forgiveness is a one-way street. **So when we are talking about forgiveness we are talking about what you can decide to do for yourself, with God.** It's letting go of the burden of unforgiveness. It's letting go of anger, resentment, and hatred that goes with it. It does not imply acceptance of injustice. Forgiveness is not accepting injustice. It is not a compromise with evil, but it does allow for the fact that human justice cannot establish objective justice. There will always be a gap. **The human will cannot establish perfect justice on earth.** So there has to be a realization that a demand for perfect justice is unrealistic. There will be perfect justice, but not at this stage of our life on earth. It will be beyond death in the fullness of God's kingdom. Therefore we pray for this!

Question

We cannot really expect complete justice on earth. There will be always problems. So part of being forgiving is to accept this fact, accept the imperfections of life before they actually hit you in the face. In other words, **adjust your awareness and expectations of life so that they actually fit what is real.** Part of being forgiving is that you accept that other people are going to have failures; you are going to have failures. So before you have a failure and then you have to forgive, you already have prepared yourself by realizing, well, this will happen. And **freedom comes from surrender to the Lordship of Christ.** It is the Lordship of Christ who will eventually bring justice to all the creation—in God's time, not our time.

And **we have to always want the people who have offended us to also find forgiveness, not suffer.** When we wish that those who offended us suffer, we are not being forgiving. I mean, that's the area where I have found the greatest unforgiveness is in regard to people with failed marriages. In divorce sometimes people have said to me, "I hope he suffers as much as I have." That's not yet forgiveness. "I forgive him, but I hope he suffers." No, that's not forgiveness. And it's not freedom.

So **true love then begets sorrow for an offense.** St. Thomas, incidentally, says that that's the **real reason for the sacrament of Penance,** is that we don't experience true sorrow for offending God, and that's why we need the grace of God so we will actually become sorrowful because sorrow, which is **a willingness to change motivated by love, is really what we need to change our lives.** Nothing will change our lives except love.

So if we don't have that, if for example we say we are sorry, and maybe we really are because of fear, for example, then we are not really going to change. In fact, we might even harbor resentment against the person that we offended because we are afraid of their retaliation or something. But sorrow, remorse, has to be actually motivated by love. And **when we love the person we offended, then we want to somehow help.** Now we can't help God much, but we can help others. And we can extend ourselves, and maybe they will accept that. Somebody told me a story the other day. They have been really seriously hurt by someone and they met this person and the person said, "Oh, I'm sorry." And this person was really planning on what he was going to do; he was going to get even. He was taken aback totally by this apology. And out of his mouth without his even desiring it or thinking about it, he says, "Oh, I accept your apology." So **it's very important we extend ourselves, and that may bring reconciliation**—that may bring reconciliation. Hopefully, it will.

Now sorrow has two forms: remorse and regret. As things develop we may want to think more about regret than remorse. This shifts the whole thing. So we will go back for a moment to the **Prodigal Son story.** Let me remind you of how it goes. All right, there are two sons. One of them says to the father, "I want my share of the inheritance." This is a way of saying, I wish you were dead. He leaves and he spends all his money—he spends all his money. Then he gets a job feeding pigs. Now he is very stupid; besides being unfair and selfish he is stupid because he says, "No one gave him anything to eat, even the husks of the pigs." I wonder why he just couldn't go take them; he was in charge of feeding the pigs. Now in Jewish storytelling, feeding pigs is like the lowest possible job you could have. But then he gets the idea I know I have offended my father and I am not worthy to be his son anymore, but I could go home and be a hand on their farm, so I'll do that. So he goes back and the father sees him coming and he is so thrilled that he has returned that he embraces him and restores him to his original status, brings a cloak and he has the ring and then he orders a big feast with the fatted calf.

The elder brother comes and says, "What's all this party?" And the father says, "Well, your brother is back." And the elder brother says, "So!" And the father says, "You have to be happy because I am so happy!" He said, "I'm the one that has been here all the time working for you, and you didn't even give me a little kid to share with my friends." So this implies of course that **the elder brother is not relating to the father in love at all, but through law. He is being dutiful.** And who are his friends? Apparently not his father, but somebody else. So this means that although he was near the father in one way, he was far from the father in another way, in an interior way. So he is really also an offensive person. He is an offender against God as well. And the difference is that the **prodigal son**—prodigal means wasteful—the wasteful son who has gone through his money which is now gone—it's gone, cannot be retrieved—he at least came back. He did not actually come back to say I am sorry—he never said that. Read the story. **He never says I'm sorry.** He said, "I have offended you, and I have done a terrible thing." He doesn't say I am sorry for that. **But the father's love restores him anyway.** But the **elder brother** who is also distant does not come back. He does not come into the celebration. He keeps himself out. **He pulls himself away from the celebration, which is a symbol of heavenly communion.** They are really two rather nasty boys. And I would say one is worse than the other, but they are both bad.

Now what the story tells us is that **the father is unconditionally willing to take back everybody**. He is willing to take back the prodigal son. He is willing to take back the elder brother, even though his words were spiteful and cruel. He even says, “You are with me all the time.” And I do believe that **Jesus told that story to indicate that there was a kind of religious practice** that is very unloving and which is really impotent to put us in touch with God, even though outwardly it may look as if the people are close to God, but they are really not; in their hearts they are not close to God. They really don’t love God. They are not really serving God out of love. They are **serving God out of law or duty**.

On the other hand, let’s look at the son now. Actually the story ends before it ends. I mean, we don’t know how it ends. Does the **prodigal son** now actually come to remorse? We don’t know. **Does he ever really come to love his father? Let’s look at what’s required for him to do that. He has to actually now forgive himself.** For what? **Wasting his inheritance**—that’s gone. Somebody said, well, where is the justice? There isn’t any. There is no justice in this story because it’s wasted. The money is gone. The inheritance is gone. The father cannot restore it. **The father can’t make up for what is wasted. This is part of the tragedy of life.** So it is really a tragic story, even though he is welcomed back. But he has wasted his life. The father can take him back. But meanwhile, what has happened with his life? The answer is nothing. He in a sense left his identity when he left the family farm. **He left his identity behind.** He created a new self. He invented a new self. And that turned out to be a completely imaginary, fictional character that now is completely gone, dissolved, a figment of fantasy. And now he has to face the fact that his life has been a complete waste. The father has taken him back. The father has forgiven him. But now **he has to forgive himself.** I believe that is what **purgatory is about: forgiving yourself.** That’s the hardest row to hoe really. It’s forgive yourself for what you have wasted.

Now if you believe what the saints say, **God is constantly addressing us**, constantly eliciting our help. Aquinas calls this “actual grace.” He is constantly addressing us **with actual grace**, wanting us to be his partners. And when we ignore that, that’s prodigality. We are wasting time. We are wasting life. We could be serving God, but we are doing something else. We think it’s great, whatever it is. We are entertaining ourselves. We are achieving something. We are doing something. Well, if it’s not for God, it’s a waste! I mean, we can do great things for God, and worldly success can definitely serve a higher purpose. But it does not always. So **everything done away from God is wasted.** God accepts us back anyway. But nothing can make up for what we have lost. **A life we could have given to God, we could have done so much good, but we don’t. Now we cannot enter into the full life of heaven until we have really been willing to forgive ourselves.** And I think that this is a very important parable for everybody because we can waste a great deal of our lives when we don’t live in faith, when we are not praying, when we don’t consult God, when we make choices and decisions that have nothing to do with God or any kind of wisdom.

One of the basic premises of the story is that **nothing good can come from what is false.** Once the son leaves the house, the household of the father, nothing good comes from his life. Even his motivation for going home is really hunger, not remorse. So I think Jesus told this story just to get people to think about themselves and about what

really God will want from them, and to realize that we need to be completely forgiving of ourselves too. And **I think probably one of the worst things about our lives is that we don't really forgive ourselves.**

And sometimes the reason for this not wanting to forgive ourselves is really **pride. We want to be able to affirm ourselves through our own power, through our own choice, and we don't accept the fact that we can't do that.** And I have met this many times in people. It's very sad. They are broken by their own pride. God doesn't want us to be broken. **God wants us to be healed. And healing requires love and love requires self-love.** Self-love is not evil. It's only evil when it displaces every other kind. But if you have a love of God, and you claim you have a love of God and no love of self, that's rather insulting to God because God created you.

So **forgiveness has got to include self.** And for a lot of people that is the hardest thing. And it may be for reasons that are really light from some other person's point of view. For example, some people think that they have done a terrible job of being a parent. And I say to them, "You know, your children have free will too." I mean, if you have done the best you can do and you love them as best as you can love them and you gave them the wisdom you had to give at that time, well, now they are the ones that have to choose and they are the ones who have to grow and it's not your responsibility. And even if you were somehow perhaps not the very best mother, the best father, you could have been, accept it. Forgive yourself. **There is no point in holding onto a feeling of inadequacy and a feeling of self-deprecation.** That is not love. So God doesn't want it. But pride is so powerful that we actually might think it is love, and we might even think it's self-love, which it is in a sick sort of way. **Pride is a sick kind of self-love.**

Question about pride and self-love

A certain amount of pride and self-love is very good, yes, it's just when it displaces everything else. But there is also a sick kind of self-love that really is self-deprecating.

Now part of then entering into this communion of love we talk about in terms of heaven does require a certain amount of suffering because **letting go of what we have to let go of may hurt because it's actually part of us. But we will be better off without it.** So that's why there is always an element of suffering involved and that's why **the idea of suffering has been associated with purgatory,** although I think too much so.

Now when I was in Italy I went to various churches where they had these remarkable murals of the end of the world, which the Italians seem to like. And in these murals they will show, for example, the resurrection of the dead. I don't know if you have ever seen these, but they are very interesting. According to the Italians, the laity rise from the dead naked, but the priests are vested. But then what really took me was these murals of purgatory, which I thought were remarkable because they were an exact replica of *Seven Bridges* gymnasium with all kinds of machines—people on machines; they are doing this, and lifting things, I mean, really, it's a gym! And I think that is where they got these ideas for this Nautilus equipment and everything. It's really from those murals in Italy.

Now we have to realize that **the love that we talk about in regard to God can be a wonderful, sweet, powerful, consoling love, but also can be terrifying.** So the mystics and the various people who have experienced God in powerful ways will say that. Well, the love of God can burn with ardor or with some kind of a pain. And so that is part of the suffering of purgatory. **But the point of it is that we come to really a pure love of self, of others, of God, since it's all one thing.** And that's what the **communion of saints** is about. It's about **everyone sharing together in the love which is God.** And one more thing, you know, when people have a marriage it's until death do them part, but many people think they are going to be married in heaven. According to St. Thomas, no. According to St. Thomas, in heaven the intimacy that belongs to a husband and wife is shared by the entire community. Now that's his opinion. I don't think he knew that, but that's what he thought. So that's something to think about. But **we are ready to enter into God exactly when we have come to completely forgive even ourselves.**