

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Mercy and Love and Forgiveness First Week in Lent Tuesday, February 16, 2016
8:15 AM Is 55:10-11; **Mt 6:7-15** (Justification is the alpha of a process that leads to the omega of salvation.)

“If you forgive men their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions.”

This idea of **reciprocation**: “The measure you measure out will be measured back to you” **is found in many places in the New Testament, and yet it has been lost by many Christians.** St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians, “There are three great gifts: faith, hope, and love, and the greatest is love.” **Love teams up with mercy and forgiveness.** It is one fundamental reality. In theology it’s called charity, divine charity.

Now in the history of Christianity some people have become a little misled. One aspect of being misled is to confuse justification with salvation. **Justification is the alpha of a process that leads to the omega of salvation.** St. Paul in Romans says that a person is justified by faith. That means **a person’s relation with God is adjusted in a positive way by faith.** That’s what justification is; it’s an adjustment of our relationship to God. It puts us in, you might say, a positive relationship with God.

But that’s not the same thing as salvation. **Salvation is the omega. It’s the fulfillment of a process of transformation.** And this process of transformation **requires love and mercy and forgiveness.** So **we have to be changed to be saved.** It is not the result of something as superficial as coming to some verbal kind of belief. But this many Christians do not observe. They believe that if they simply profess the name of Jesus or say they believe in Jesus, God will overlook their sins and they will be forgiven. But that’s not what this text says.

This text says, and this is the word of God: “If you forgive men their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive men”—however much you believe, **however much you take Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior—“if you do not forgive men, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions.”** It’s very important that we **read the whole gospel in all its parts and maintain the tradition in its integrity,** a tradition that is witnessed by **Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Paul** for one, and then **all the saints** in the history of the Church, **all of which who witness to the importance of mercy and love and forgiveness.**