

Homily for the 3rd Sunday of Easter

When I was in high school there was a student in my class who was bullied...severely. One person in the class was responsible for the bullying and led the charge against this bullied student. While most of us took no part in the bullying, our silence made us as guilty as the classmate who did the bullying.

In 1989 my high school class celebrated its 25th Anniversary. It was a three-day event. Both the student who was bullied and the student who led the bullying attended. The high point of the celebration was mass and dinner. During dinner something very extraordinary happened. The classmate who had led the bullying stood up during the dinner and asked for our attention. In front of all of us, he addressed the student that he had bullied throughout high school. He publicly apologized to him and asks for his forgiveness. The student who had been bullied stood up, accepted his apology and offered him forgiveness for what had to be a humiliation that most of us would never have forgiven, much less endured. All of us who were present were stunned and ashamed of our own part of something that should have never happened. We all needed to be forgiven.

Forgiveness is very difficult. I don't know what is harder: to forgive or be forgiven. No matter on what side of the coin you find

yourself, forgiveness demands courage. Forgiveness demands that we put aside our hurt feelings or admit to our failings, in order to bring and/or receive forgiveness. Forgiveness also brings healing for it eases the pain in our heart and calls us to live with a new vision and new sense of direction. And forgiveness inspires hope. For all new beginnings should lead us to the realization that an unwillingness to forgive (or be forgiven) only binds us in a prison of hurt feelings and smoldering disdain. Forgiveness empowers us to live life differently.

The Gospel today is about forgiveness. It is about Christ forgiving Peter. Three times Christ addresses Peter and gives him an opportunity to profess his love for him. Three times...each one echoing one of the times that Peter had denied Christ the night before he was crucified. It is only in forgiveness that Peter can learn to accept his own failure by embracing the love that Christ has for him.

Each one of us has failed...failed ourselves, failed another, failed God. No one of us sails through life without learning that we make mistakes, we hurt others and we are hurt by others. Forgiveness is the gift that heals our hearts and gives us the grace to “follow” Christ in every moment and every action of our lives.