

Conversion of Heart

Lenten Reflections on Mercy and Forgiveness

Week 3

READINGS: *Exodus 3:1–8a, 13–15; 1 Corinthians 10:1–6, 10–12; Luke 13:1–9*

We must work toward our salvation

Not forgiving someone is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die. Holding a grudge against those who have wronged you only destroys you on the inside. It does nothing to create peace.

That's why Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, / for they will be called

sons of God" (Mt 5:9). God's mercy is given as a reward for those who pursue it with diligence. We must work to cultivate peace if we desire to see it flourish in our families, communities, nations, and especially within our own selves.

In today's Gospel reading, we see how this truth is manifested in the fig tree.

"Sir, leave it for this year also, and I shall cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it" (Lk 13:8).

It was surrounded by the untilled and unproductive soil, much like those who withhold forgiveness are surrounded by unrest, anxiety, and spiritual inactivity. We feel worthless in such a state, and as such we risk being unproductive, unhealthy, and ultimately destroyed.

However, the good farmer, here representing God, provides us with hope. He tills our soil and fertilizes our souls with mercy. His forgiveness gives us another chance for spiritual survival, but only if we are able to bear good fruit as a result. Our good fruit, then, is the mercy we show to others, which leads us to being known as the true sons and daughters of the God of peace.

For Reflection

- Has God tilled the landscape of your soul so that it can bear fruit abundantly?
- Have you helped him weed out the vices that keep your soul from thriving as it should?
- Have you helped others by tending to their spiritual growth in service to them?

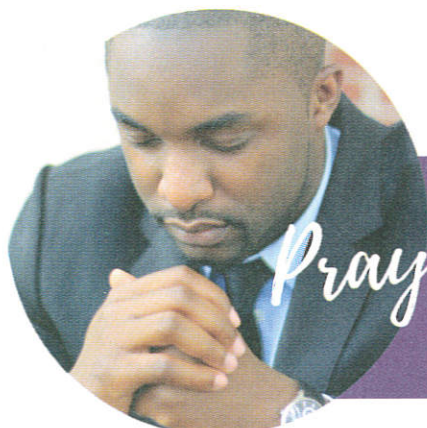




Saint

Prayer and work

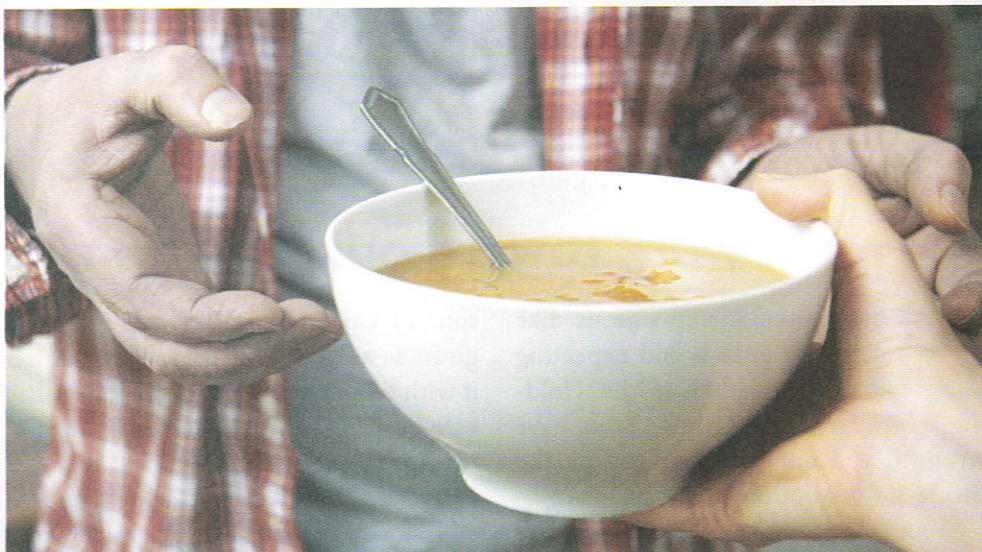
Benedict was a man of silence and constant reflection. He was also a man who knew how to work! He helped form the Benedictines, a Catholic religious order whose motto is *ora et labora* ("pray and work"). Benedict knew that in order to show God how much he loved him, he would need to work diligently in both his prayer life as well as through manual labor. He understood St. Paul's words that we must "pray without ceasing" (1 Thes 5:17) and "work quietly" (2 Thes 3:12). Indeed, St. Benedict was given God's reward of mercy for having persevered in prayer and for acquiring a work ethic that was marked by the spiritual worth of every one of his daily tasks.



Prayer

The saints are like the stars. In his providence Christ conceals them in a hidden place that they may not shine before others when they might wish to do so. Yet they are always ready to exchange the quiet of contemplation for the works of mercy as soon as they perceive in their heart the invitation of Christ.

~ ST. ANTHONY OF PADUA



How to bear GOOD FRUIT

Live the corporal works of mercy — feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the sick, ransom the captive, bury the dead — and the spiritual works of mercy — instruct the ignorant, counsel the doubtful, admonish the sinners, bear patiently those who wrong us, forgive offenses, comfort the afflicted, pray for the living and the dead.

Family Activity

The more you know ...

One of the best ways to be diligent in our zeal for holiness is to make it fun. Sometime this week, gather your family members and distribute notecards. On each notecard, write down as many quiz questions each person can about the Catholic faith along with the answers. Then, put them all in a box and take turns picking them out and answering them one-by-one until all of the cards have been answered.

"Called to beatitude but wounded by sin, man stands in need of salvation from God. Divine help comes to him in Christ through the law that guides him and the grace that sustains him" (1949).

Catechism Chat

Lord, I have not worked as hard as I should at knowing, loving, and serving you. Please renew me with the zeal, energy, and order I need to pursue you with all of my heart, all of my soul, and all of my mind. I am yours; may I acquire the work ethic needed to achieve eternal life with you in heaven.