
On Forgiveness and Lent

An article from the *Cathedral Times*
by Canon Wallace Marsh



On Ash Wednesday we hear that Lent is a season of “penitence and forgiveness.” (BCP, 265).

A struggle many of us face in our personal lives is how to practice forgiveness. How are we to forgive?

We are supposed to extend forgiveness, but we can’t seem to do it. Why? Well, it comes down to the fact that we have been wronged. We have been hurt, or someone we love has been hurt, and we cannot seem to extend forgiveness.

So, how do we learn to practice forgiveness?



Scripture offers some insight. We are called to “imitate Christ.”

St. Paul tells the Ephesians to “imitate God” (Ephesians 5:1), and he tells the Philippians “to have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5).

Imitating Christ is a wonderful spiritual practice, often revealing what it means to live a Christian life; however, imitation can have its limitations when it comes to forgiveness. We try to imitate Christ, but we still find ourselves incapable of practicing forgiveness.

Instead of imitating Christ, Holy Week offers another alternative—participate in Christ's forgiveness.



The Paschal Mystery reminds us that we have been buried and raised with Christ. One of our Eucharistic Prayers states that Christ dwells in us and we in him (BCP, 342-343).

St. Paul tells the Galatians, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me” (Galatians 2:19-20).

Martin Luther, the Protestant reformer, once wrote: Christ “is fixed and cemented to me and abides in me...Christ and I are one” (Lectures on Galatians, 1535).

When we understand that we are united with Christ, we have this profoundly personal experience of forgiveness.



Yet, here is what this means when it comes to practicing forgiveness: Jesus Christ, who dwells within us, in fact extends forgiveness to those in our lives whom we need to forgive!

So, we practice forgiveness by participating in Christ's forgiveness.

As Episcopalians, we understand the importance of participating in Christ. Our faith is shaped through our participation in the liturgy. The liturgies of Holy Week invite us participate in the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection. When we journey with Christ through the cross and grave, we have a deeper understanding of what it means to practice forgiveness and love.