

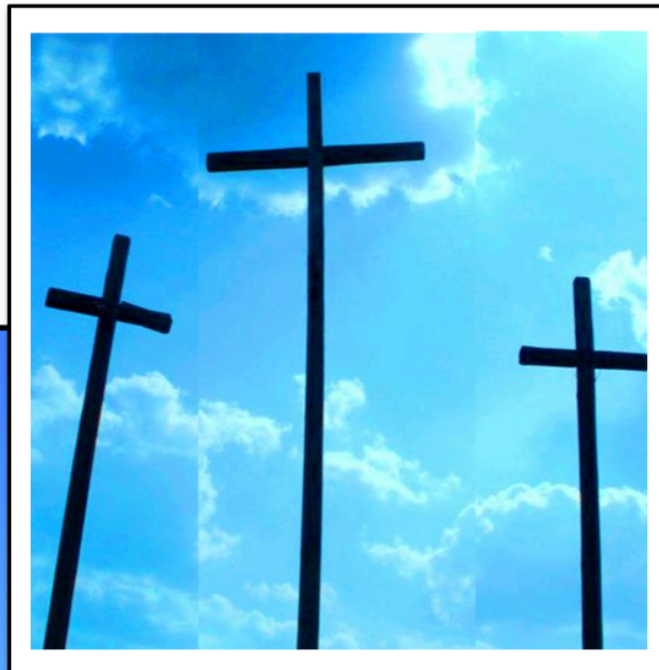
CATHOLIC MOBILIZING NETWORK



Jesus, Remember Me

Experiencing Restorative Justice through the
Lens of Scripture

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Opening Prayer - A Prayer for the Expansion of Restorative Justice (adapted)

O God, you delight in clemency and tread underfoot our guilt. (Micah 7:14-15)
Hear us as we pray with St. John Paul that "The dignity of human life [may] never be taken away, even in the case of someone who has done great evil." (Pope John Paul II, St. Louis, MO, Jan. 27, 1999)

We pray for understanding, for vision, and for the strength to spread the good news that "Our witness to respect life... includes the lives of those who fail to show respect for others." (USCCB, Living the Gospel of Life, no. 22, 1998)

For all this we pray, Amen

Introduction

- Thank you, who I am, etc.
- Catholic Mobilizing Network
 - ◆ CMN proclaims the Catholic Church's unconditional pro-life teaching and its application to capital punishment and restorative justice. We work in close collaboration with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.
 - ◆ Thanks to the involvement of Vicki Schieber, who has become a nationally recognized spokesperson for Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights, it was determined that restorative justice, which seeks to repair the hurt caused by the violent taking of human life, should be integral to CMN's work.
- Restorative Justice
 - ◆ Restorative justice focuses first on the victim and the community harmed by the crime, rather than on the dominant state-against-the-perpetrator model. This shift in focus affirms the hurt and loss of the victim, as well as the harm and fear of the community, and insists that offenders come to grips with the consequences of their actions.

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Experiencing Restorative Justice through the lens of scripture

- Tonight we'll pray, listen to scripture, share our stories
- During our discussions...
 - ◆ Practice respectful, non-judgmental listening
 - ◆ It is not my intent that our conversations be perceived as some sort of "group therapy" session. However, please remember we are sharing from our hearts and I would ask that what we may discuss in our times of sharing be considered confidential. Can we agree on that?

Reflection : The Criminal on the Cross

Often when we consider the characters or personalities we associate with the way of the cross our first inclination is to recall those well-known, named figures. For some it may be Mary, the mother of Christ. Her role in his suffering and the great love many have for her makes her an obvious choice, in particular mothers, parents, or perhaps anyone that has been present to someone who has endured great suffering. Some may think of Simon of Cyrene, who helped Christ carry the cross. Simon may conjure for us times when we were called upon to do something for someone else, times when we initially resisted but for whatever reason we relented, and ultimately were transformed by the experience. Some may identify with Veronica, whose simple act of kindness in reaching out to Christ and offering a brief moment of comfort and care may help us recall those times when we stepped outside our comfort zone a bit to reach out in love and compassion to someone in dire need.

Tonight, I would like us to consider another personality, one not mentioned by name in scripture but identified by their sin:

When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified [Jesus] and the criminals there, one on his right, the other on his left. Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us." The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply, "Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation? And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." [Jesus] replied to him, "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." (Luke 23:33, 39-43 NABRE)

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As we go through our process tonight think about this criminal, often referred to as the thief on the cross or the penitent thief. Our Catholic tradition has given him the name "Dismas". While never canonized by the church he is venerated in some communities as St. Dismas.

We know little about Dismas other than his crimes were sufficient to warrant crucifixion. Some, like St. John Chrysostom have speculated that he was a thief who dwelled in the desert, robbing and perhaps even killing those he encountered. St. Gregory the Great suggested he was guilty of murdering his own brother, much as Cain had killed Abel. Whatever the case Dismas was eventually incarcerated and ultimately executed for his crimes.

What sets Dismas apart is his recognition of his own sin and request for forgiveness. But it goes beyond a panicked desire for penance before death. In fact, it is the impenitent criminal that appears to succumb to a moment of panic, saying to Christ "Save yourself and us." Dismas makes clear his fear of God, a gift of the Holy Spirit. When I talk about the gift of "Fear of the Lord" with Confirmation candidates I stress that it is not cowering, panicked submission to the wrath of God but an understanding of the awesome might and wonder that is God, a respect for all God is. Just as we may respect all that our parents are to us as givers of life and providers and nurturers. Fr. John Hardon has suggested this gift of the Holy Spirit "confirms the virtue of hope." (Modern Catholic Dictionary) Scott Richert writes, "We often think of hope and fear as mutually exclusive, but the fear of the Lord is the desire not to offend Him, and the certainty that He will give us the grace necessary to keep from doing so. It is that certainty that gives us hope." (http://catholicism.about.com/od/beliefsteachings/p/Fear_of_the_Lord.htm)

Dismas, in his final moments demonstrated both that great respect for God as well as the hope for something better, something beyond the sinful life he had led. And Jesus confirmed that hope, telling Dismas "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

This is a Restorative Justice moment for Dismas. He takes responsibility for his crimes, expresses contrition and seeks forgiveness from the person he has wronged by his sin, namely God. And Christ as the human personification of God grants Dismas that forgiveness, as well as promises that his contrition will allow him to be a part of the community of God in heaven.

Process

- Together we are going to embark on a journey through sin, mercy and forgiveness together. We will hear scripture, consider our own lives, share with

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others, and pray. And like all good journeys hopefully learn something about ourselves and our faith and our God along the way.

Reflecting on a time we have sinned (Justice)

- Scripture: Cain Kills Abel (Genesis 4:1-16 NABRE)

[Adam] had intercourse with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, saying, "I have produced a male child with the help of the Lord." Next she gave birth to his brother Abel. Abel became a herder of flocks, and Cain a tiller of the ground.

In the course of time Cain brought an offering to the LORD from the fruit of the ground, while Abel, for his part, brought the fatty portion* of the firstlings of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry and dejected.

Then the LORD said to Cain: Why are you angry? Why are you dejected? If you act rightly, you will be accepted; but if not, sin lies in wait at the door: its urge is for you, yet you can rule over it.

Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let us go out in the field." When they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

Then the LORD asked Cain, Where is your brother Abel? He answered, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?"

God then said: What have you done? Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground! Now you are banned from the ground that opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. If you till the ground, it shall no longer give you its produce. You shall become a constant wanderer on the earth.

Cain said to the LORD: "My punishment is too great to bear. Look, you have now banished me from the ground. I must avoid you and be a constant wanderer on the earth. Anyone may kill me at sight."

Not so! the LORD said to him. If anyone kills Cain, Cain shall be avenged seven times. So the LORD put a mark on Cain, so that no one would kill him at sight.

Cain then left the LORD's presence and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

- Reflection - God's Model of Justice
 - ◆ In the story of Cain and Abel, Cain commits murder out of jealousy. However, when God confronts Cain he does not in turn put him to death. Instead, he sets Cain apart from the community. This "setting apart" has been a way communities throughout time and throughout the world have punished those that have injured others.

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- ◆ Who would Jesus execute? Recently we spoke with hundreds of young people at the National Catholic Youth Conference. We asked this question: “Who Would Jesus Execute?” We received a variety of answers... President Obama (presumably for his tacit support of abortion), Adolf Hitler, Judas, child molesters, mothers who kill their children, abortion providers. We even had one young person say “myself.” When we asked why they thought that they replied “because I’m a sinner.” Clearly, many have an incomplete understanding of God’s justice and mercy. Of course, Jesus wouldn’t execute anyone. God didn’t condemn to death Cain for the murder of his brother, Abel. Cain was expelled from the community, but God decreed he was not to be harmed. But the answers we received to the question “Who would Jesus execute?” demonstrates the confusion many have about church teaching. We still have a long way to go.
- Process
 - ◆ Recall a time when you hurt or wronged someone. Think about the situation. The person you hurt. How did the person react? How did you feel afterwards? What did it do to your relationship?
 - ◆ Pair up with someone and take turns sharing your story.
- Debrief
 - ◆ Henri Nouwen wrote “When we experience the healing presence of another person, we can discover our own gifts of healing. Then our wounds allow us to enter into a deep solidarity with our wounded brothers and sisters.”
 - ◆ Justice - you get what you deserve
- Prayer
 - Loving God, help us to be people of justice. Help us heal from our own sinfulness, and from those wounds of sin we can grow in better understanding of the human failings of our sisters and brothers. Amen.

Reflecting on a time we judged others (Mercy)

- Scripture: Jesus and the Woman Caught in Adultery (John 8:2-11 NABRE) Early in the morning [Jesus] arrived again in the temple area, and all the people started coming to him, and he sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and made her stand in the middle. They said to him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?” They said this to test him, so that they could have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and began to write on

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the ground with his finger. But when they continued asking him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Again he bent down and wrote on the ground. And in response, they went away one by one, beginning with the elders. So he was left alone with the woman before him. Then Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She replied, "No one, sir." Then Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go, [and] from now on do not sin any more."

o Reflection - Throwing Stones

- ◆ In this event from the life of Christ a woman who has sinned is brought before Jesus. In that time the sin of adultery was a capital crime, punishable by death. Even in our modern world some countries still punish women by stoning. Some groups kill others by barbaric means simply because they think or believe differently. In the United States will still kill to demonstrate killing is wrong.
- ◆ It would be easy - even seem justified - for my friend Vicki Scheiber to cast stones. Vicki travels the country to share the story of the tragic murder of her daughter, Shannon. Shannon, an accomplished Duke University graduate was studying at the Wharton School to achieve a doctorate. On May 7, 1998, she was attacked, raped and murdered by a rapist who broke into her apartment. At the time of her murder, there had been a pattern of serial rapes in the city of Philadelphia. Shannon's killer eventually moved to Colorado and entered into the same serial-raping pattern. The killer had committed 14 rapes - Shannon's being the only capital case. It took four years to find Shannon's killer in Colorado. He was convicted of his crimes and sentenced to life without parole in a maximum-security prison. Vicki - a former Benedictine sister - never faltered in her faith, always hanging on to her moral and religious convictions. Rather than responding in anger and seeking revenge, Vicki reminded herself of the simple statement: "What would Jesus do?" If she didn't remain true to her Christian values then were the values really hers? Vicki and her husband refused to ask for a sentence of death because it went against their values and they believed was not something Shannon would want. To honor her daughter, Vicki works to abolish capital punishment. She believes through restorative justice convicted offenders can come to terms with their actions and find healing for themselves.

o Process

- ◆ Recall a time when you allowed your judgment of others to get in the way of relationship. Think about the situation. How were you condemning or

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marginalizing someone else? When did you realize what you were doing was wrong?

- ◆ Pair up with someone and take turns sharing your story.
- Debrief
 - ◆ What is necessary for us to move beyond vengeance and grant mercy?
 - ◆ Pope Francis
 - “Mercy is the Lord’s most powerful message. It is not easy to trust oneself to the mercy of God, because His mercy is an unfathomable abyss – but we must do it!” (First Statement as Pope, 2013)
 - ◆ Mercy - you **DON'T** get what you deserve
- Prayer
 - Christ our Savior, help us to be people of mercy. Enlighten us so we may examine our own faults before we cast judgement on the faults of others. Strengthen us to share the gift of compassion with those in need. Amen.

Reflecting on a time we reconciled (Forgiveness)

- Scripture: The Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32 NABRE)

Then [Jesus] said, “A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of your estate that should come to me.’ So the father divided the property between them. After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation. When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need. So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine. And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any. Coming to his senses he thought, ‘How many of my father’s hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger. I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers.”’ So he got up and went back to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him. His son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.’ But his father ordered his servants, ‘Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.’ Then the celebration began. Now the older son had been out in the field

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and, on his way back, as he neared the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean. The servant said to him, 'Your brother has returned and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' He became angry, and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him. He said to his father in reply, 'Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends. But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf.' He said to him, 'My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours. But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.'"

- Reflection - Lost and Found
 - ◆ We are all familiar with story of the Prodigal Son. Take a moment and consider what character in the story you identify with at this moment. Perhaps you are having a conflict with someone, or a person you were close to now seems distant and you long to welcome them back with open arms. Perhaps you're feeling like the wayward son - you've hurt others, squandered opportunities or resources and now you're desperate to make your way back. Maybe you're the older son, who looks upon the forgiveness or compassion shared with someone else with distrust, confusion, anger. Each time we come to this story, we may see ourselves as a different person. We all want to be the loving father, full of joy and openness. At times we are that foolish person of sin, hoping against hope there will be an avenue of redemption for us. And all too often we are the bitter older brother, who seeks to deny something freely and lovingly given to someone who really doesn't deserve it.
- Process
 - ◆ In your own experience, how have you been challenged to forgive someone that seemed unforgivable? Or perhaps a time when you humbled yourself and asked for forgiveness? Think about the situation. Recall how you felt at the resolution. How were you transformed?
 - ◆ Pair up with someone and take turns sharing your story.
- Debrief
 - ◆ What are the greatest obstacles to forgiveness?
 - ◆ Jesus says we must forgive 70 times 7 - does our forgiveness condone sin?
 - ◆ What is more difficult - forgiving others or forgiving ourselves?
 - ◆ Grace - you get what you **DON'T** deserve

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- Prayer
 - Gracious Father, help us to be people of forgiveness. Enlarge our hearts so we may set aside our anger, set aside our wounds, and embrace our sisters and brothers as you always seek to embrace us. Amen.

Conclusion

- Dismas Reconsidered

Tonight, through scripture, through prayer, through our conversation we have traveled the road of justice, mercy and forgiveness together. Experiencing a justice that restores, not destroys - can still be a difficult Lenten journey for anyone. Dismas had to find his way to the cross before he humbled himself before God. We all have to find our way back to the arms of the Father.

In his second letter to the Corinthians Paul writes "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:9) When we embrace our weakness, our wounds, we become people of humility and healing. Justice and mercy meet on the road to forgiveness.

Closing

- Prayer - A Prayer for Mercy

Loving Father ~

Together we pray to walk in faith and charity,
Ever trusting in your mercy:
You always wait for us, love us.
You have pardoned us with your Blood,
And pardon us every time we go to you to ask for forgiveness.
Let us be renewed by your mercy.
Let us accept the grace of Christ's Resurrection.
Let us be loved by Jesus -
Let us enable the power of his love to transform our lives too;
And let us become agents of this mercy,
Channels through which your Holy Spirit can water the earth,
Protect all creation and make justice and peace flourish.

Amen.