

17TH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME, YR C

July 25th, 2010

QUEEN OF PEACE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY
GAINESVILLE, FLORIDA
Rev. Jeff McGowan

1ST READING: GENESIS 18:20-32

Then Abraham said, "Will you sweep away the innocent with the guilty?"

PSALM 138

Lord, on the day I called for help you answered me.

2ND READING: COLOSSIANS 2:12-14

Brothers and sisters: You were buried with him in baptism in which you were also raised with him

GOSPEL: LUKE 11:1-13

Pray...forgive us our sins for we forgive everyone in debt to us...

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The essence of prayer is not the effort to make God give us something—as this is not the basis of sound human friendships—but there is a legitimate prayer of petition. God offers us two kinds of gifts. The first are those that God gives to everyone whether we ask for them or not. They like the gifts a loving, capable parent gives a child: food, clothing, shelter, care and watchfulness. Life, love, the air we breathe are among these universal gifts. But there are other gifts, which are conditioned upon the desires of the child. A father may be eager to have his son go to college, but if the boy refuses to study or becomes a delinquent, the gift the father intended for him can not be bestowed. There are gifts we must ask for like the gift of forgiveness.

One of the powerful questions the Lord's Prayer suggests is: "How does one forgive the unforgivable?" Simon Weisenthal was a survivor of two years in the Nazi concentration camps. He spent the rest of his life hunting down Nazis and bringing them to justice. Eighty-nine members of his family died in those camps. He lived the daily torture, abuse, and cruelty of the Nazis. He tells the story that one day when he was in the concentration camp a nurse came out to where he was working and tapped him on the shoulder and told him to follow her. He was taken to a make shift hospital for German soldiers. He was taken into a small room and saw a patient nearly completely wrapped in bandages like a mummy. It was obvious this person was not going to live. The nurse left him alone with the patient who was a German soldier. The young man told the

prisoner that he had been raised a Catholic but abandoned his religion in favor of a new religion, which demanded he give all he could give to the Nazi cause. When the war broke out he volunteered immediately for the elite SS troops. In the eastern zone, they were given the assignment of dealing with local Jews. And so his unit gathered up all the Jews and forced them into a building which the soldiers proceed to burn, machine gunning anyone who tried to escape. The memory haunted the young soldier. Some of the Catholic teaching he had received as a child returned to preoccupy him with remorse for what he had done. He knew he was dying and he desperately wanted to be forgiven. So, he requested that a Jew, any Jew, be a representative of those he murdered. Weisenthal was chosen just by chance to hear this soldier's story and his plea. He did not want to die a murderer and he begged for forgiveness. And Weisenthal said the only response he could give was to get up and leave the room without saying a word, without granting forgiveness. What would you have done? It is an interesting question isn't it?

We pray, "Forgive us as we forgive," that's the gospel challenge. Now reverse the situation and imagine yourself the dying young Nazi soldier. Is there a Simon Weisenthal in your life that cannot, or will not, or is unable to forgive you? I don't mean to suggest our suffering is equivalent to what Weisenthal endured. But there are circumstances in our more ordinary lives that bring this home. Is there someone we've wounded who won't forgive us? Or, on the other hand, could there be a parent, a brother or sister, another student, a former souse, boyfriend, girlfriend, teacher, who is unforgivable in our hearts?

Maybe this helps us understand the sacrament of confession or reconciliation. The priest, standing in for Jesus who prayed, "Father forgive them," even as he was tortured and killed, says the words we, like that soldier, so need to hear, "Go in peace, your sins are forgiven." So the Gospel is powerful, whether we are the one who cannot forgive or the one who needs to be forgiven, Jesus assures us that everyone who asks receives; and the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened." Some of God's blessings come without our even asking; God wants to give us other gifts as well

but we have to make ourselves ready to receive them and ask for them. Prayer is serious business, but it leads to good news!