

DEEP IN SCRIPTURE

Verses & Notes September 27, 2006

Matthew 6:14-18

Matthew, chapter 6

- 14: *"For if you forgive men their trespasses,
your heavenly Father also will forgive you;*
- 15: *but if you do not forgive men their trespasses,
neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."*
- 16: *"And when you fast,
do not look dismal, like the hypocrites,
for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men.
Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.*
- 17: *But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,*
- 18: *that your fasting may not be seen by men but by your Father who is in secret;
and your Father who sees in secret will reward you."*

Discussion Notes:

Introduction:

"Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his Holy name,
Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." Psalm 103:1,2

- Sounds like the psalmist is having a discussion with his self; maybe even a struggle with his self / his soul.
- How do we discipline our selves (body & soul) to be obedient to God? To grow in holiness? To be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect"

Discuss three things today that could easily take three programs, all dealing with growing in holiness.

- Email from last week:

Dear Marcus and Dave,

Thanks for the great program today!

Listening to this topic helps me to have more confidence in the event that I may sometime be in discussion with Protestants.

How should a Catholic respond to the question, "If you were to die tonight, would you go right to Heaven?"

*Thanks and God bless,
Kathy*

- Background Material on Fasting:
 - Jim's Research Notes on Early Fathers (on Website)

- Pope John Paul II & Fr. Cantalamessa on Fasting (on Website)
- This week's special: "The How-to-book of Catholic Devotions" by Mike Aquilina & Regis Flaherty.

The Importance of FORGIVENESS:

14: *"For if you forgive men their trespasses,
your heavenly Father also will forgive you;*
15: *but if you do not forgive men their trespasses,
neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."*

- Here in Matthew an elaboration / expansion on petition in Lord's Prayer;
- Parallel in Mark 11:25-26 as barrier to effective prayer:
*As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. And Peter remembered and said to him, "Master, look! The fig tree which you cursed has withered." And Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. **And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against any one; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.***
- Jesus later told a parable to make the same emphasis: Mt 18:21-35
 - Peter's question: how often should we forgive a sinful brother?
 - *"So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."*
 - So, therefore, Jesus is not merely calling for an external act but for an internal conversion of the heart.
- He elsewhere reiterated the importance of this reciprocal connection, in Matthew 10:32-33:
So every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.
- The Apostle Paul repeated this emphasis and exhorted Christians to observe it:
 - Ephesians 4:31-32
"Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."
 - Colossians 3: 12-13
"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."
- In the upper room, Jesus gave his Apostles the authority to forgive sins:
Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."
- This undercuts the false doctrine of "Eternal Security" or "Once Saved-Always Saved," because the forgiveness we receive from God is conditioned on the forgiveness we give!
- So what are we to do?! Jesus said, "Apart from me, you can do nothing" (John 15:5)
 - Ask for the grace to forgive and forget every time you pray the Our Father;
 - And pray for this often, because bitterness & desire for retribution are hard to silence!

The Importance of FASTING:

- 16: *"And when you fast,
do not look dismal, like the hypocrites,
for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men.
Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.*
- 17: *But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,*
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and your Father who sees in secret will reward you."*

- "And when you fast."
 - An already understood & accepted practice of faith.
 - The Law of Moses had prescribed only one general fast, on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:29-31, etc.)
 - Later tradition added several fasts to commemorate sorrowful events (Zech 7:3-5)
 - The prophets had warned about proper spiritual disposition for acceptable fasts.
 - By the Time of Jesus, pious Jews fasted often:
 - Mt 9:14, *"Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?"*
 - Lk 18:12 (in Jesus' parable of the Pharisee & the publican) *"I fast twice a week..." [but Jesus warned] "Every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."*
 - The Didache (1st century): Jews fasted Mon & Thu; Christians to fast on Wed & Fri.
- Traditional practice had developed over time: sackcloth, ashes, & rent clothing.
 - Good in itself but led to ostentation & wrong placed motives.
 - Jesus, therefore, was changing their traditional practice, toward an inward observance!
- "Rewards: (benefit)
 - As previously mentioned, these are not specifically defined.
 - However, the benefits are both here and now.
 - The danger of empty fasting: for neighbor; out of mere obligation; merely external.
 - The Church's discipline of fasting ...
 - So how do we benefit? Fasting disciplines the soul, conscience, and the will.
 - Psalm 103 ... "talking to one's self"
 - Fasting recognizes the direct connect between our body & soul.
 - Small steps of discipline to prepare for the larger challenges of life.
 - In fasting, we chose to say no to good things so we can say no to bad things.