**HOMILY REFLECTION GUIDE**

**Preaching Series: Unbound — Freedom in Christ**

**WEEK 4 of 5**

**Fourth Sunday of Lent: Choosing to See, to Forgive, and to Be Free**

**March 14, 2021**

**The Five Keys of Unbound Ministry**



1. **Repentance and Faith** – acknowledging our sinfulness and need for Jesus’ forgiveness and help;

2. **Forgiveness** of ourselves and others;

3. **Renunciation** of any evil influence in our lives;

4. **Authority**—taking the Authority we have in Jesus to overcome evil and break its power in our lives;

5. **The Father’s Blessing** — receiving the love and affirmation God wants to give us as his beloved children.

**Main Points of Today’s Homily**

* A prayer found at Ravensbruck concentration camp: **“O Lord, remember not only the men and woman of good will, but also those of ill will. But do not remember all of the suffering they have inflicted upon us. Instead remember the fruits we have borne because of this suffering: our fellowship, our loyalty to one another, our humility, our courage. When our persecutors come to be judged by you, let all of these fruits that we have borne be their forgiveness. Amen.”**

Some incredibly holy woman at Ravensbruck was able to write this prayer because she was free: free from bitterness, hatred and the desire for revenge.

* Forgiveness is probably the most difficult teaching of Jesus for us to follow, and it goes hand-in-hand with his other extremely challenging commandment of loving our enemies.
* Jesus experienced in his human life the difficulty of forgiving others: his own apostles who betrayed and abandoned him when he went to the cross, the Jewish leaders who wrongfully accused him, and the Roman soldiers who crucified him. None of them deserved to be forgiven, yet he forgave them all. In the same way, he forgives you and me even though sometimes we do not deserve it.
* Forgiveness is the second key of the Unbound Ministry model. In this key, we come to understand that forgiveness is ultimately a choice, not a feeling. Thus forgiveness has to come from God’s grace touching that deep place within us where we make difficult choices: our will.
* Forgiveness also involves another choice: it involves choosing to see rather than choosing to be blind. That is where today’s Gospel can speak to us. I am using today’s Gospel especially to challenge us to choose to see those who have hurt us as God sees them.
* Forgiveness of others begins when we choose to see those who have hurt us, not as animals or monsters or devils, but as human beings like us; they are imperfect and flawed humans just like us. Then, if we allow it, forgiveness slowly leads us to the next step of seeing them as children of God and as loved by God. If we cannot see them that way, our forgiveness is not yet complete.
* When we choose not to forgive others, we choose to be blind. We choose not to see anything good in them; we choose to see only what they have done to us. One of the reasons Jesus commands us to forgive is because he knows that this blindness of not forgiving will only cause conflict and harm in our families, in our communities, in our churches and in so many places in our world.
* The Unbound Model’s Second Key of Forgiveness reminds us that forgiveness truly is freedom in Christ! And this is the main reason Jesus commands us to forgive: he wants us to be free. It is the only way we will be free from the prison and the poison of anger, bitterness and even hatred that can fill our hearts and minds and even sicken our bodies. Forgiveness is the only way that we will find wholeness and healing from the wounds we receive in our lives.
* One of the things that helps us to forgive is to realize how much we have been forgiven by the Lord. In other words, forgiveness flows into us from Jesus on the cross before it flows out from us to others. Receiving God’s forgiveness through Jesus unlocks the power for us to forgive; on the contrary, unforgiveness blocks God’s love for us and keeps us bound.
* Another thing that helps us forgive is to remember that it is a process; it can take a long time. So don’t give up, just keep praying and ask God to help you.
* Just as Jesus did the impossible in today’s Gospel by healing a man who was blind from birth, and just as he enabled a woman at Ravensbruck concentration camp to do the impossible and forgive her Nazi torturers and killers, so he can do the impossible and help you to forgive someone who has hurt you deeply. Choosing forgiveness is choosing to see as God sees. Choosing forgiveness is choosing to be free in Christ.

**Prayer Read at the End of the Homily**

*(from Neal Lozano’s book “Unbound:*

*A Practical Guide to Deliverance, p.83):*

“Jesus, You died for me that I could be forgiven and the door to reconciliation with the Father would be opened. You revealed Your love for me while I was still in sin. You gave Your life as a holy sacrifice for me. Give me the courage to forgive and the faith to trust that what You have given me I can give to others.”

**Key Scriptures This Week**

**Matthew 6:12-15—** *from the Our Father:*

…and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and do not subject us to the final test, but deliver us from the evil one. If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions.

**Matthew 18:21-35**

Then Peter approaching asked him, “Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus answered, “I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times…So will my heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives his brother from his heart.

**Luke 6:36-37**

Be merciful, just as [also] your Father is merciful. “Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven.

**Matthew 19:26**

...for God all things are possible.

**Pertinent Quotes**

* “Not forgiving is like drinking poison every day, waiting for the other person to die.” (Unknown)
* “Forgiveness is setting a prisoner free and discovering the prisoner was you.” (Lewis B. Smedes)
* “Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.” (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.)

**Questions to Think About**

1. Are there areas where you have chosen to embrace unforgiveness? Do you feel resentment and bitterness over a past offense?

2. Do you believe that God wants you to be free from these burdens and that he can give you that freedom?

 3. How do you think God sees the person or the people who hurt you? Can you see them as a child of God?

4. Are you able to forgive someone even if they do not apologize?

**A Challenge for You**

I would like to challenge you to do something this week at home. If there is someone you need to forgive, I invite you to do the following, either by yourself, or better yet, with a prayer partner or someone you trust. During a time of private prayer, I want to ask you to say out loud:

“In the name of Jesus, I forgive \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (here you mention the person’s name)

for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (here you say specifically what the person did to hurt you).”

So, for example, you might say, “I forgive so-and-so for betraying me.” It is really important to say this out loud and to be specific about the person and what they did; it is more difficult to do, but it is also more effective. You can mention more than one person.

**Testimony from Unbound Ministry**

“For the past two years I have been literally battling for my life due to a lie that I have believed since my husband left me two years ago for a woman that we had met on a vacation we were on. The devastation from this affair and the ensuing rejection left me, more often than not, begging God to take my life…

“...But Praise God! I see! I see! And what now has been revealed to me is that none of my husband's decisions were about me. He bought the lie [from the devil] and in turn I bought the lie. The oppressing spirit of rejection that has oppressed me for the past two years was commanded to leave and I truly feel that it is gone. I now know who I am, the precious, precious daughter of Almighty God. He created me and everything he created is GOOD and I am VERY GOOD and I am WORTHY OF LOVE, I am WORTHY OF FIDELITY, I am WORTH SACRIFICING FOR. I know this because I know my savior and HE has done a great work in me.”

 **For more Unbound testimonies go to:**

[www.heartofthefather.com/prayer/testimonies.](https://www.heartofthefather.com/prayer/testimonies)

**Recommended Resources**

* Book: Unbound: A Practical Guide to Deliverance.For more information about today’s homily, read Chapter 4.
* Neal and Janet Lozano’s website: www.heartofthefather.com/
* YouTube video: **Introduction to Unbound and the Power of the Gospel**—www.youtube.com/watch?v=9owV8QsOIn4