

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

Dear Parishioners,

Well, the last boxes are finally unpacked. I still have to move some things around and hang my pictures on the wall. But after nearly two months of the moving process and living out of suitcases it's a relief to be settled in. I'm home again.

It's amazing how much "stuff" one can accumulate in a few years. While packing and unpacking I've thought that I should follow the example of Mother Teresa's sisters who literally only possess the clothes they wear. Even though I gave away a lot of my books before I came here, like many people, I just have too much "baggage."

Looking out my window at our cemetery I am reminded that sooner or later we will all lose our physical baggage. As the old saying puts it: "There are no pockets in a (burial) shroud."

But what about our emotional and spiritual baggage? What happens to it? You know what I mean. The negative feelings we hold towards others, the grudges and emotional scars. How long do we have to carry this stuff around? Actually, that's up to us.

We can choose to carry our negative feelings with us allowing no past hurt to be unforgiven or unforgotten. We can keep bitterness in our hearts because being the victim protects us from ever having to say that *we are sorry for the pain we have inflicted on others*. Indeed, we can choose to carry the burden of our resentments all our lives allowing them to distort our vision to the point that we can no longer recognize the basic, if flawed, goodness of our fellow human beings.

It's a terrible way to live and an even worse way to die. All that bitter baggage. We can't get into heaven with it. That is why Jesus tells us repeatedly in the Gospel that we must forgive one another or we will have no share in the Kingdom. In fact, the command to forgive our enemies is one of the distinctive and revolutionary teachings of Christ. No other religion requires this of its followers. And of course Jesus Himself forgave His torturers while dying on the cross. Just as "there are no pockets in a shroud" *there are no grudges in heaven*.

So what are *we* to do? For who among us has not carried resentments toward others because of some pain they inflicted on us?

It can be very hard sometimes to forgive people especially when they won't ask for forgiveness. The solution is both simple and difficult. The solution is to pray for the gift of a forgiving heart.

It is simple to know this but hard sometimes to put in practice because, let's face it, often we don't want to forgive. When we've been wronged by another often it is our pride that receives the deepest wound and wounded pride can be the biggest obstacle to forgiveness.

One early Christian author wrote that if we go to pray and don't see our enemy's face then we really aren't praying. He wrote this because he knew that there is nothing more important to our spiritual lives than being reconciled with our enemies. We cannot say that we truly love God without trying to forgive those who have hurt us. WE must pray for forgiving hearts.

So, if you have any resentments, any negative thoughts about anyone past or present, living or deceased, pray for the gift of forgiveness. If you find that hard, then perhaps you need to begin by praying for the *desire* to forgive.

It may take time, depending on the pain you received. But don't give up praying for the gift of forgiveness until you can say sincerely that you carry no grudges. While we're at it, we should pray to be forgiven for the pain we have caused others, even if it was unintentional. We are all sinners and we are all in need of the spiritual healing that only the Lord can provide. This is why He gave us the sacrament of Reconciliation, Confession. So we can say, "Lord, I'm sorry for what I have done." Please take away my bitter baggage."

If we choose to lose the baggage we can't take with us into heaven the Lord will gladly lift its burden from our hearts

With my prayers,

Fr. Conley