

After this manner therefore pray ye...

the Homespun of the Sincere

part three of three

Be careful to keep the old receipts which you have from God for the pardon of your sins.

William Gurnall

Forgetting Things Past

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. But Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."

Luke 23:33-34a

It is not uncommon, when visiting neighboring farms or homes, to come upon dogs or cats who are being forced to live something less than ideal lives. Dogs are given a filthy blanket by the back door and may be expected to live with the rain that pelts their face, or the snow that collects on their matted fur. Cats are left to fend for themselves, working animals who must earn the farmer's miserly shelter by ridding his barn of vermin.

Not so here. God has given man the beasts of the field to manage—but not to abuse. We are all God's creations, and are to treat each other with respect. Because this is the philosophy of this household—one in which even marauding mice are gently caught and released (at least, that is, by the humans)—it came as an unpleasant surprise years ago when Angel, our outdoor cat, slashed my face with her claws.

We're a hands-on family, and whether they like it or not, the four-footed members get their share of hugs. Cats, especially, don't mind a little face rubbing from time to time, so it was a natural move for me

to bend down to greet Angel, placing my face close to hers. Apparently for this newest member of the family—who joined us one day from out of the woods, starved and pregnant—my face came a bit too close for comfort.

In a split-second she slashed my face, from just under the left eye and down the cheek, leaving me a bloody mess. Had she aimed just one centimeter higher, I would surely now be a writer of debilitated foresight. Angel was unapologetic, but after nursing by my good wife, the injuries were considerably improved, leaving my grizzled visage only slightly less pretty.

Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity
And passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His
possession?

He does not retain His anger forever,
Because He delights in unchanging love.
He will again have compassion on us;
He will tread our iniquities under foot.
Yes, You will cast all their sins
Into the depths of the sea.

Micah 7:18-19

Angel didn't mean to hurt me; it was just survival instinct on her part. It's true that she (now departed) was not terribly bright, but she was not mean. For a quick moment she simply forgot that I was not a threat. So I bore her no grudge. She was forgiven her transgres-

sion even as the blood oozed from between the fingers clutching my wounded face.

We have a God who demonstrates an even higher form of mercy, in that He even forgives transgressions we commit *without* ignorance. We are not simple-minded beasts who live by instinct, but crafty creations of a “higher” order. We seldom sin accidentally; there is more often a self-serving motive behind our actions.

Even so, God forgives quickly—as quickly as those claws were raked across my cheek. When we come to Him on our knees, confessing the wrong, His compassionate response is swift and thorough.

Angel and I made up within the hour. In no time she was back to rubbing against my legs and permitting me the privilege of filling her bowl with food. I would still give her a good rub (albeit at arm’s length) and enjoy her scatter-brained company. Our relationship had not been tainted by a momentary mistake.

She didn’t know any better. She was just a cat.

...bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.

Colossians 3:13

Let the words of my
mouth and
the meditation of
my heart
Be acceptable in
Your sight,
O Lord, my rock and
my Redeemer.

Psalms 19:14

know You mean well, but I think I’m sufficiently mature already. No more trials, okay?”

These could be the words to our prayers—but it wouldn’t do any good. God the Father is in the business of raising us up into the image of His Son, and to expect Him to quit would be to expect Him to suddenly become a bad parent. Neither is going to happen.

So here we are: hapless lumps of insecurity, filled with our own unsightly inclinations, beseeching the Father to both give us success through His trials, and to get us out of the scrapes in which we have set ourselves.

Prayer is, at its root, putting into practice the relationship we have in theory with the members of the Godhead. If we never speak to our human parent, then it is a thin relationship at best; if we never listen to what our parent has to say, then we are a poor daughter or son. God’s word says that at the moment we take Christ as Lord, we become adopted sons and daughters of God the Father. But if we never take the time to sit down and talk, the family tie becomes strained and brittle.

Here, in the prayer-model Jesus gave us, we have the full flowering and depth of heavenly conversation:

Unsightly Inclinations

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

If God does not in malice tempt, still He does in mercy try.
God sends trials; we make them temptations.

Alexander Maclaren

Oh, how we would love to cry out in our prayer, “Heavenly Father, leave me alone! I know You won’t tempt me to evil, but I beg You as well not to send me through Your trials. Leave me alone!” How we wish that Jesus had not prayed,

“I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one.”

John 17:15

but, instead, had asked the Father to lift us up and out of this hotbed of enticing transgressions, so it would not have been *necessary* to protect us from the evil one. How we would love to tell the Father, “I

Praise: *My Father above, I praise Your name.*

Submission: *Have Your way here, in my life, as You do already around Your throne.*

Entreaty: *I ask for You to sustain me.*

Confession: *While I ask You to pardon my offenses against You, I ask for the grace to pardon, as well, the offenses against me.*

Integrity: *And when I am tempted by evil, from without or within, give my feet wings.*

And though it was not part of Christ’s original prayer, someone has added a suitable coda of

Dedication and Praise: *The kingdom is Yours, the power is Yours, the glory is Yours forever and ever.*

Amen.

