

Christ is in our midst!

Dearly beloved in Christ,

The poet Alexander Pope penned words that are familiar in our everyday speech: “To err is human, to forgive, divine.” This is an important perspective. But we must be careful what we mean when we say “to err is human.” To err, to sin, is only a part of our fallen human nature. Sin is not intrinsic to us, God did not create us with sin. Forgiveness pertains to God. Forgiveness is an aspect of Who the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are in their divine nature.

In the gospel reading today we see Jesus Christ, the God-Man, making clear His divinity by forgiving the sins of the paralyzed man. The man came seeking healing, but healing of his body only. Jesus sees through to the man’s soul and first cleanses his soul and then heals his body. This first miracle, the forgiveness of sins, is the greater. Our Lord Himself tells us “do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body.”

The scribes are outraged by Jesus’ words of forgiveness. They say within themselves, “This man blasphemes!” And Jesus performs yet another wonder, he reads the minds and hearts of the scribes, he reveals their innermost thoughts to everyone standing there. He shows to them and to the people that He is the Son of God in human flesh who has the authority to forgive sins.

In this miracle of the forgiveness of the sins of the paralytic we see that God is always ready to forgive us our sins. He only awaits our turning to Him in repentance. He lifts the burden of sin from our souls and bodies, He restores us as He did the prodigal son. This is who our God is, a God of love and mercy. Who deals with us not according to justice but according to His divine mercy and forgiveness.

We humans, however, have a tendency to project onto God the traits of our fallen humanity, creating an angry God Who looks to strike us down in sin. How do we respond to offenses against ourselves? What is our temperament when we are offended? We might picture God as petulant, grudge-holding, vengeful and the like. We may fear that God is unforgiving because that’s what we experience ourselves. If we are to appreciate God’s eagerness to forgive, then we sinners must take upon ourselves the divine attribute of forgiveness, being eager to forgive one another.

“Who can forgive sins but God alone?” We all can be quick and eager to forgive those who sin against us. To err is human, to forgive divine. We can prove that we are indeed children of our heavenly Father, brothers and sisters in Christ by the Holy Spirit when we say to someone with a true heart, “You are forgiven.” Saint Paul tells us today, “Let love be without hypocrisy.” Our love for one another will be without hypocrisy if, when we ask forgiveness for our sins of God, we grant forgiveness to one another.

God is not cheap with his mercy and forgiveness. He is not vengeful over our sins. He always is ready to forgive repentant sinners, each and every one of us. By the same token, we must aspire to the divine life by having a big heart, an open heart, that does not hold onto grievances but that can speak the words of Christ, “You are forgiven.”