

“So I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; because she has shown great love.”

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Once upon a time, a young man, named Matt, told me ‘his story.’ At my request, he wrote it out.
With his permission, I now share it with you.

“My father left home when I was 11. My whole family was broken up. The tears flowed for weeks, except mine... . I began to hate my father, especially for hurting my dear mother... .

I started into crime ...and drugs. At age 12, I was picked up for 3 car thefts... .

Now, my mother is a Christian. She hounded me—as an adult, to go on this Retreat. I knew nothing about it, cared less, but only registered to get her off my back.

During one of the group talks, I began daydreaming about God. I visualized myself on my knees before Jesus, as he hung on the cross. An enormous weight of guilt was upon me... . I wept for ... forgiveness. As I wept, I realized God forgave me...that he really loved me ...in all ...my ...filth!

I opened my eyes and wiped my tears... . At last, I knew that God was for real... .

I came off that Retreat high ...for the first time in my life without smoking, doping, or drinking. I actually had to take the next day off-work to try to think it all through and to pray.

While I was reading the Bible, I began to think about my father. I didn’t want anything to keep me from getting closer to Jesus. So, I called my dad.

That night, I went to his apartment, having prayed for guidance by the Holy Spirit.

When I arrived, we sat down and talked about... nothing.

Finally, he asked, “So, what did you come here for?”

I was relieved that he asked me; yet, I didn’t know where to start.

So I explained how, on the Retreat-weekend, I learned that I cannot judge any person for anything, no matter what. Then I asked for his forgiveness for hating him & having bitterness and for judging him.

He left the room and came back with a folder. Then he pulled out a slip of paper, which we both read. It was a note I had written to him years before. It read:

‘Bill:

Who do you think you are... and what do you think you are doing?

I hate you and don’t ever want anything from you --ever again in my life.

Your ex-son,

Matt.’

Suddenly, I was aware of all the pain he must have gone through, carrying that ugly note all those years. I threw my arms around him and tears of forgiveness & love flowed bounteously.

It was like walking out through prison gates.

I was no longer imprisoned by that cancerous hatred.

We talked a little longer and then I kissed him –on the lips, said good-bye, & I was on my way.

I took a cab most of the way home that night, but I walked the last mile.

Joy overflowed in me as my walk turned into a jog, the jog into a run.

With arms outstretched, I screamed into the night-air, “I love you, God!”

And he blessed me ...greatly ...that night!”

This is, probably, one of the most touching stories I have ever heard.

It is especially appropriate for today’s readings:

From the 1st reading, it illustrates the kind of forgiveness God showed to David.

From the Gospel reading, it illustrates the kind of forgiveness Jesus showed the woman
–total, unconditional forgiveness!

It illustrates the kind of forgiveness Jesus taught each of us to have for one another.

The more we read the Gospels, the life of Christ, the more we see how totally, forgiving Christ was ...**AND** how totally forgiving he taught **us** to be.

Jesus taught us something else, too. He taught us that the forgiveness we show others will be the criterion, the ‘yardstick’ by which God will forgive us.

Listen very closely and note how unequivocal Jesus was, when he said:

**“If you forgive others ...your heavenly Father will forgive you.
BUT, if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive you.”** Mt.6:14-15

My dear friends, next Sunday is Father’s Day. Matt’s story illustrates the spirit of Father’s Day, for it illustrates something we often overlook.

‘What, exactly, does Matt’s story illustrate about the spirit of Father’s Day that we often overlook?’ you ask.
Well, I am glad you asked that question!

Simply put: it illustrates that fathers need forgiveness, too!

So often, we think of fathers as ‘perfect.’ But, actually, they’re quite human. They are just like us. They have flaws. They have faults, too –sometimes big faults ---**just-like-us!**

Yet, beneath these faults, is a loving person ...a person, who will keep, for years, a painful, ugly letter from a pain-filled, lost son.

If Matt’s father had not kept that letter all those years, Matt might never have known how much his father really did love him.

And, by the same token, had Matt not forgiven his father, his father might never have had the chance to prove to Matt how much he loved him.

And so, Matt’s story is a beautiful illustration of both:

**The spirit of Father’s Day and...
The spirit of forgiveness
--that permeates today’s readings and the life of Jesus!**

Matt’s story shows us the miraculous power of forgiveness:
...the power by which something that was broken ...can be made whole again
...the power by which something that was soiled ...can be made clean again.

I will now close with these words from a great American father & general, Douglas MacArthur:

**“By profession, I am a soldier and I take pride in that fact.
But I am prouder –infinitely prouder, to be a father.
It is my hope, that my son, when I am gone, will remember me, not from battle,
but in the home, repeating with him our daily prayer:
‘Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name... . Forgive us our trespasses...
as we forgive those who trespass against us.’ ”**

May Almighty God, our Abba, bless you ...the **Father**, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.