

IN RECENT HOMILIES, FR JOCK HAS ASKED TWO QUESTIONS

- Why do I come to Mass?
- How do I view forgiveness?

A parishioner has offered her reflections in response to these questions. Please feel free at any time to offer yours.....

Why do I come to Mass?

- For a sense of belonging to a faith community.
- To be a part of the community: both giving & receiving - to have something to offer and something to receive.
- To be carried & held at times, especially when times are hard and faith wavers; and to be there for others when they are in need.
- To celebrate with others when times are good.
- To be inspired, encouraged and challenged in living the Gospel values.
- To feed my soul and connect with what really matters, as I continue to develop my personal relationship with God.

The last one I can do on my own, however being part of a faith community not only is more supportive (..and challenging!) but makes the journey less lonesome and allows for greater and truer discernment.

How do I view Forgiveness?

It seems to me that forgiveness is an internal process within the forgiver, involving a change of emotions and attitude. Forgiveness brings the forgiver peace of mind and freedom from resentment - as such, it probably does more good for the forgiver than the offender. It is so much easier to forgive when the offender is truly sorry...a far more difficult and complicated process otherwise.

It is perhaps important to realise first, before contemplating forgiveness, what forgiveness is not (this is particularly important in the case of abuse):

Forgiveness is NOT condoning, forgetting, pardoning, reconciliation.

Forgiveness is NOT granted because a person deserves to be forgiven.

Forgiveness DOESN'T MEAN we'll put ourselves back into a harmful position.

Forgiveness DOESN'T MEAN we accept or approve of the offender's continued wrong behaviour.

The act of forgiveness happens within the forgiver and is often a conscious and deliberate choice; although in my experience, it sometimes just happens over time. In a way, it is an act of love, mercy, grace - a letting go. It is not necessary to have a face-to-face encounter with the offender for forgiveness to take place. What happens within the forgiver is far more meaningful. It is possible to forgive without trusting the offender or having a close relationship with them. Forgiveness with reconciliation can really only happen when the offender is truly sorry, in order for the relationship to be restored. Sometimes it is important to still be cautious and self-protective, especially where abuse has taken place and there is continued distrust.

If the relationship is valued and worth restoring, then forgiveness comes more easily. It is hard to forgive Hitler, someone who has abused or murdered your child, those who abuse power, etc. Maybe that's the realm of pure darkness, where the light will never penetrate. That's the realm of God's forgiveness.