17OT-C “Act of Will” July 27, 2025

St Paul gives us some striking verbiage today! “*When you were dead in transgression…he brought you to life along with him…obliterating the bond against us… nailing it to the cross!*” Jesus Christ has set me free! So what am I to do with this freedom?

The short answer is FREE OTHERS. But how do I go about doing that? Who if any am I holding hostage? There lies the rub…

There’s a whole lot of interceding going on in today’s scripture! Abraham barters down God from 50 to 10, and Jesus teaches us to nag God in prayer like the neighbor trying to get three loaves of bread for some guests. “Ask, seek, and knock” Jesus teaches us. Of course, like everything Jesus teaches us to do, he does it himself… Makes me remember back to something I read last Lent by Dr. Edward Sri…

The first words Jesus spoke just after being nailed to his cross were these: **“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”** Jesus himself “asks, seeks, knocks.”Dr. Sri points out that although this petition would have been surprising to the Roman executioners it should be no surprise to us. Jesus had been teaching it from the beginning: Love your enemy; Pray for those who persecute you; (and today) Forgive everyone in debt to us.

We may not always be able to heal a wound inflicted upon us by another, or forget the hurt. But then again forgiveness is not a heart or head action anyway. Forgiveness is an act of our will, and as the Catechism teaches this act of will can take two forms: **turn the hurt into intercession and turn it into compassion.**

First, Jesus on his cross intercedes for the Roman soldiers asking God the Father to forgive them. In other words, Jesus asks that they be released or set free by God from their sin. This is something we can imitate as well with those who hurt us. Pray for them asking God the Father to release them from their sin.

(By the way the good news is that we don’t have to have warm fuzzy feelings for those who have hurt us in order to pray for them.) Don’t need to like them, just need to love them with our actions of intercession on their behalf.

Second, Jesus on his cross turns injury into compassion. He doesn’t dismiss the hurt as unimportant or insignificant. Rather, Jesus who knows hearts knows they do not know what they do.

As Dr. Sri notes, often in life we hurt each other not out of malice or spite, but rather through thoughtlessness, or impatience, or self-preoccupation. This doesn’t change the fact that we’ve been hurt, **but choosing compassion does change how we might be able to position our will to intercede to God on the other’s behalf**.

I have often been told that I should presume the good in others. At times when I have found myself hurt by others I have been tempted to think this naive. But in reality the saying is right; compassion creates windows of possibility for reconciliation that otherwise would not exist.

A military training once revealed to me that studies showed that a person could pessimistically presume bad intentions in others and never be hurt in life at the cost of being negative most of the time; or a person could optimistically presume good intentions in others and be happy and positive in life at the cost of being wrong only about 2% of the time. The pessimists were never surprised, but the optimists lived happier more fulfilling lives!

Jesus nailed our transgressions to the cross, obliterated the bond against us, so we could be free to love as he loves and forgive as he forgives…… as he forgives us!

We have the capacity to turn hurt into intercession and compassion; it just takes an act of our will. God wants only the best for each of us. Imitate Jesus on his cross with our own acts of will and experience the new life God the Father would have us enjoy!