

Father Dave's Weekly Homily

09/11/11 24 A

-- A couple of weeks ago, I listened to a tape by the Catholic lay evangelist Matthew Kelly. You may have seen his book *Rediscover Catholicism* which was distributed here last year. He spoke about how the gospel often gives us an "inconvenient" message.

-- One of those messages is that of unlimited forgiveness. He asked *Can you forgive Osama bin Laden?* (The tape was made before his death) He admitted that was very difficult, but that's what the gospel tells us to do.

-- On this 10th anniversary of 9-11, forgiveness remains a challenge. And God's word today appropriately speaks about this message. It reminds us that wrath and anger are hateful things. It tells us that we can only expect healing from the Lord if we quit nourishing anger.

-- And then we have the story of the unforgiving servant. He's forgiven a debt so great he can't possibly repay, yet he refuses to forgive a relatively small debt his fellow servant owed him. The forgiveness of the original debt is cancelled by his refusal to forgive.

-- The events of Sept. 11 ten years ago brought out both the worst and the best in human nature. Virtually all of us remember the horror of seeing airplanes crash into three different buildings, guided to their targets by misguided men who thought they were doing God's will.

-- We saw small groups of people cheering over their actions. And there were isolated incidents of mindless vengeance in reaction to 9-11, for example, the Arizona murder of a man wearing turban by one who proclaimed himself a patriot even as he was being arrested.

-- But we also saw the best in human nature, in the cell phone calls from the towers and the airplanes, in the police and firemen who came to the aid of people in those burning buildings, and in the countless numbers who worked at ground zero in the months after the tragedy. They included at least one of my former parishioners.

-- And, at a chapel very close to ground zero in New York, a group called the Alliance for Forgiveness formed. They prayed for reconciliation, even inviting guest from Hiroshima and Nagasaki, sites of the WWII atom bomb attacks, to pray with them.

-- These examples shine as a light telling us not to hold on to past hurts, but to acknowledge the hurt and move on. When we refuse to move on, we are imprisoned by our lack of forgiveness.

-- Forgiveness is not a matter of sluffing off the past or forgetting what has happened. In South Africa, commissions were set up after their civil wars for people of both sides to come before and confess their crimes. Forgiveness involves admitting guilt.

-- Nor does forgiveness mean there is no punishment for the offender. Pope John Paul forgave the man who attempted to assassinate him, but he remained in prison for a number of years after that.

-- But forgiveness *does* mean that we do not allow the hurt we've suffered to imprison us. That is what happened to the unforgiving servant. The torture he experienced was not so much from his master as it was from his own hardened condition.

-- The call to forgive echoes in all our lives. We may not have been victims of a terrorist attack, but we all have been hurt by others; in some cases, deeply hurt. Forgiveness is not a natural instinct; it is possible only with the help of the One who forgave us a debt we cannot possibly repay.

-- A few days after 9-11, there was a memorial service at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. (Irene damage). The words of the dismissal from that service are words we should all heed:

Go forth into the world in peace...Hold fast to what is good. Render to no one evil for evil...Support the weak. Help the afflicted. Honor everyone. Love and serve the Lord.

-- To this we must say: **Amen!**