



Lenten Reflection for Wednesday, April 6th

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You can listen to the reading and reflection by clicking [here](#).

Hebrews 2:1 - 9

Therefore we must pay greater attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. For if the message declared through angels was valid, and every transgression or disobedience received a just penalty, how can we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? It was declared at first through the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him, while God added his testimony by signs and wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, distributed according to his will.

Now God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels. But someone has testified somewhere, "What are human beings that you are mindful of them, or mortals, that you care for them? You have made them for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned them with glory and honor, subjecting all things under their feet." Now in subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside their control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them, but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

There are things I really feel terrible about, things that tend to haunt me on Sunday or Monday nights when it's harder to sleep. Things I have done mindlessly, driven by emotion, ways I may have hurt people, ways I fear I abandoned my belief in God, sometimes impulsively, and sometimes, worse, more knowingly. And on the hardest nights, it feels like all of it projects madly to my mind: big things, big regrets, whose memories enter into my chest and seem to hit my guts like bricks, threatening to hollow them. I might think of ways I acted toward my younger brother when we were teenagers, the cruelty I slung at him when all he did was look up to me. Or I ruminate on life choices I have made that tipped more in favor of comfort or vanity than of values I think God would want me to prioritize. I also think of smaller things, too, that in the severe quiet of night, bring just lower volume versions of the same hard feelings. I might think about

things that happened that day, ways I didn't handle my 5-year old's tears with enough sensitivity, a joke I made that may have offended someone, or a phone call I didn't return to someone who might be in need.

This passage addresses some of the questions I have about my own behavior, questions that join my guilt and shame to wrestle with my insides on these nights.

For example: how did God crown us with glory and honor, and still give us control, or free will, when we are clearly so flawed, so fallible.... when free will is inevitably so slippery in the hands of humans? After all, the power of free will is more than an honor; it's an ever-present and awesome responsibility. Lose your mindfulness to it, make a snap decision, or react to something when you're tired or stressed or angry..... and in a moment, the responsibility can fumble in our human hands, and can leave us mis-stepping in our faith, acting against our values, causing pain in others, damaging or even severing our dearest connections.

Yet, this passage reminds me that God has not only forgiven our sins; it seems God, as usual, knew better than us from the start. Sins are inevitable. So perhaps free will could have never existed without the grace of forgiveness, without the power of Christ's death.

Are our sins, then, matched with "just penalty"? Or is our behavior just the cause of an effect we have to live with? Our behavior can cause us guilt, and sometimes great loss. Yet, there seems to be grace in those consequences. For example, guilt can be made productive by God's grace. When it's justified and when we allow it, this uncomfortable feeling can serve as our "checks and balances," forcing us to look inward and outward to the "why" and "how" of our behaviors, so that we can learn their origin and what made us vulnerable to them, and then recalibrate, according to our faith. Guilt, after all, is what leads us to say sorry, to hug our children when their faces are wet with tears, to call our brothers to share our love, to make lasting commitments to do better.

I like to think that as a parent, a therapist, a partner, a friend, a human sharing the world with other living beings -- that I am forgiving. I don't condemn those who bump into me on the subway, curse my clients for lapses in judgment, and I don't internally vilify my children for making mistakes of children who are hungry, tired, emotional, or otherwise unknowing. I forgive my husband his moments of being less sensitive or more prone to road rage; I know what stress he sits with and I know how little he sleeps.

As a therapist, I have seen the intense emotions my clients also wrestle with, whether anger, sadness, worry, or guilt and shame.... as being fueled by and as fueling black and white; rigid, thinking: about how things "should" go, about how others "must" act and how they themselves "need" to be. Dogmaticism, invariably, cannot be held up by the intricacies of reality, and to attach to it, can leave all of us deeply disappointed, angry, afraid, self-questioning and worse, disconnected from the very point of the power God has given us. I teach my clients dialectics, the idea that there is no absolute truth or wrong or right way; there are always valid reasons why even the worst things happen to us, the deepest hurts and betrayals, and also, why we ourselves act in ways that might later jolt us awake in the middle of the night.

Despite my struggles with turning this inward in my sleeplessness, I do believe God is dialectical. While faith in God, Jesus's life as a template, gives us guidelines on how to live and treat each other, and how to weigh our choices, these are guidelines. Free will and control gives us room to consider and account for the power of circumstances, circumstances as valid as fatigue, confusion, fear, anger, hunger or desperation.

Our sins, should we call them that even as Christ's death has redeemed us of them, are multi-determined.

I have been forgiven by my own brother. And as far as I know, my children forgive me (so far), too. This passage is a reminder that forgiveness is founded upon understanding. This Easter, I am going to try to sleep easier knowing that while I am always responsible to do better, I can let the meaning of Christ's death rest compassionately in the gut of mine that might otherwise be wrenched: which is that I am forgiven, because I am also profoundly and lovingly, understood.



Colleen and her husband Eduardo live in Windsor Terrace with their sons Sebastian (8) and Lucas (5). They all feel lucky to have been welcomed by the Holy Apostles community about five years ago.