

- In our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, we see Saul (St. Paul) after his conversion returning to Jerusalem, and it says: “... *he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him.*”
- Well, duh! Just a couple of weeks before Paul was hunting Christians and throwing them into prison; of course they were afraid of him! They suspected his “conversion” was a ruse to trap them.
- All except Barnabas.
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- When everyone else was steering clear of Paul, Barnabas courageously stands up for him, and by that shows himself to be a truly Christian man.
- We often see our own reflection in others and make them what we believe ourselves to be.
- A good and honest man will very often think good of others, or at least give them the benefit of the doubt...while a dishonest or mean man will naturally expect the same of others.
- Barnabas showed himself a true disciple of Christ when he “takes a chance”, and does not hold Paul’s past against him.
- Very often because a person makes a mistake, he is condemned in the eyes of many forever.
- Don’t many of us tend to hold grudges or anger toward something that was done to us decades past—even over something trivial?
- But, if our salvation depends upon forgiving—which it does—what offense does NOT become trivial compared to that?
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- It is the great characteristic of God that He always wants to forgive...like the father of the prodigal son, waiting for us to come down the road...to come home. Thus the sacrament of confession.

- Our own nurturing of the fires of anger is a self-chosen slavery that does nothing but harm us...when we could be set free with a simple act of forgiveness.
- All of us have probably known a bitter person...one who find offense at everything and nurses the grudge. They often have no happiness in life. Do you want to be like that?
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- Immaculee Ilibagiza is a Rwandan woman who survived the holocaust in that country in the mid-90s in which around a million Rwandans were killed.
- Almost all of her family was killed--many raped and hacked to death with machetes. She herself survived only by being crammed into a hidden 4x6 bathroom with 7 other women for 3 months.
- And yet, even with all that, she has learned to forgive even her family's murderers.
- She gives an analogy of eternity as a huge sheet of paper; maybe like a roll of butcher paper.
- Now place a tiny dot somewhere on that piece of paper.
- That tiny dot compared to the entire sheet is like our individual life compared to eternity...and yet, the paper is undending.
- So, she thought...is it really worth forfeiting eternal salvation and everlasting happiness with God just to nurse a burning hatred within us...no matter what the offense against us?
- That's when Immaculee realized that she **MUST** learn to forgive.

- Who among us has had to suffer anything even approaching a horror like that...or the horror of the cross...and yet we refuse to forgive?

- The same St. Paul whom Barnabas befriended wrote later in his letter to the Colossians: “...*as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.*” (Col 3:13 RSV)
- And Jesus warns: “...*if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses...*” (Mat 6:15 RSV)... and thereby we would forfeit eternal life.
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- “*Oh, I can’t forgive!* No doubt many have been greatly wronged, and find it very hard to forgive.
- Pray to God for strength to do so...for with God nothing is impossible.
- And remember Jesus nailed upon a cross saying: “*Father, forgive them; they know not what they do.*”
- When someone sins against us, they harm us only as much as we allow ourselves to be harmed. They harm themselves much more.
- And so should we not then, as Jesus’ disciples, beg God: “*Father, forgive them; they know not what they do.*”
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- We gain nothing by holding hatred and grudges in our heart? In fact, we risk losing eternal life.
- What do we gain by forgiving? Everything. Peace of soul on earth; eternal life in Heaven.
- On the 1000th...the 10,000th...the millionth-year anniversary of arrival in Hell, could one be comforted in the remembrance that... “*Yes, I may be suffering eternal torment...but I kept my pride in never forgiving Bob or Betty who did me wrong!*”
- Can we not now see Immaculee’s wisdom?
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- And what a great vehicle of evangelization forgiveness is as well. When we forgive, we give TO the forgiven seeds of hope...as Barnabas gave such hope to Paul.
- If even Barnabas would have refused to forgive and avoided Paul along with the others, would Paul have despaired and abandoned his mission?
- But what DID happen? Barnabas forgave, and gave Paul that joy of being befriended and forgiven...and Paul went on to become the greatest evangelist of the Gospel that the world has ever—and will ever—see.

- Will that light of Christ that we reflect when we lead someone else to Jesus?
- Will that joy of being free from grudge and hatred bring others to Christ? I dare say: yes.
- What greater joy of heart do WE receive than to be forgiven when we have wronged someone?
- Jesus says in our Gospel today that we must bear fruit.
- Well...there is no greater fruit than the soul of a sinner brought back to God.
- St. James tells us: “...*whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.*” (Jam 5:20 RSV)
- And if charity and forgiveness can lead to that, what greater fools can we be than to refuse them to anyone?

Reading 1

[Acts 9:26-31](#)

When Saul arrived in Jerusalem he tried to join the disciples,
but they were all afraid of him,
not believing that he was a disciple.
Then Barnabas took charge of him and brought him to the apostles,
and he reported to them how he had seen the Lord,
and that he had spoken to him,
and how in Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus.
He moved about freely with them in Jerusalem,
and spoke out boldly in the name of the Lord.
He also spoke and debated with the Hellenists,
but they tried to kill him.
And when the brothers learned of this,
they took him down to Caesarea
and sent him on his way to Tarsus.

The church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria was at peace.
It was being built up and walked in the fear of the Lord,
and with the consolation of the Holy Spirit it grew in numbers

Responsorial Psalm

[Ps 22:26-27, 28, 30, 31-32](#)

R. (26a) **I will praise you, Lord, in the assembly of your people.**

or:

R. **Alleluia.**

I will fulfill my vows before those who fear the LORD.

The lowly shall eat their fill;

they who seek the LORD shall praise him:

"May your hearts live forever!"

R. **I will praise you, Lord, in the assembly of your people.**

or:

R. **Alleluia.**

All the ends of the earth

shall remember and turn to the LORD;

all the families of the nations

shall bow down before him.

R. **I will praise you, Lord, in the assembly of your people.**

or:

R. **Alleluia.**

To him alone shall bow down

all who sleep in the earth;
before him shall bend
all who go down into the dust.

R. I will praise you, Lord, in the assembly of your people.

or:

R. Alleluia.

And to him my soul shall live;
my descendants shall serve him.
Let the coming generation be told of the LORD
that they may proclaim to a people yet to be born
the justice he has shown.

R. I will praise you, Lord, in the assembly of your people.

or:

R. Alleluia.

Reading II

[1 Jn 3:18-24](#)

Children, let us love not in word or speech
but in deed and truth.

Now this is how we shall know that we belong to the truth
and reassure our hearts before him
in whatever our hearts condemn,

for God is greater than our hearts and knows everything.

Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us,
we have confidence in God
and receive from him whatever we ask,
because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.

And his commandment is this:

we should believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ,
and love one another just as he commanded us.

Those who keep his commandments remain in him, and he in them,
and the way we know that he remains in us
is from the Spirit he gave us.

Gospel

[Jn 15:1-8](#)

Jesus said to his disciples:

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower.

He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit,
and every one that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit.

You are already pruned because of the word that I spoke to you.

Remain in me, as I remain in you.

Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own
unless it remains on the vine,
so neither can you unless you remain in me.

I am the vine, you are the branches.

Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit,
because without me you can do nothing.

Anyone who does not remain in me
will be thrown out like a branch and wither;
people will gather them and throw them into a fire
and they will be burned.

If you remain in me and my words remain in you,
ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you.

By this is my Father glorified,
that you bear much fruit and become my disciples."