

The Apostles' Creed: Week 14

...The forgiveness of sins...

In the Scriptures:

1. Who is a God like you,
 who pardons sin and forgives the transgression
 of the remnant of his inheritance?
You do not stay angry forever
 but delight to show mercy.
You will again have compassion on us;
 you will tread our sins underfoot
 and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.
You will be faithful to Jacob,
 and show love to Abraham,
as you pledged on oath to our ancestors
 in days long ago.

(Micah 7:18-20)

2. Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to his own town. Some men brought to him a paralyzed man, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the man, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven."
At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, "This fellow is blaspheming!"
Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, "Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'?"
But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins."
So he said to the paralyzed man, "Get up, take your mat and go home." Then the man got up and went home. When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to man.

(Matthew 9:1-8)

3. For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

(Matthew 6:14-15)

4. This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk

in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

(1 John 1:5-10)

As described by Christian writers:

5. ‘And forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors.’ For we have many sins. For we offend both in word and in thought, and very many things we do worthy of condemnation; and ‘if we say that we have no sin’ (1 John 1.8), we lie, as John says, ‘we deceive ourselves’. And we make a covenant with God, entreating him to forgive us our sins, as we also forgive our neighbors their debts. Considering then what we receive—and in return for what?—let us not put off or delay forgiving one another. The offenses committed against us are slight and trivial, and easily settled; but those which we have committed against God are great, and need such mercy as is His only. Take heed, therefore, lest for the slight and trivial sins against you, you shut out for yourself forgiveness from God for your very grievous sins.

- Cyril of Jerusalem, “Catechetical Lectures”

6. Do not fall into despair because of stumbling. I do not mean that you should not feel contrition for them, but that you should not think them incurable. For it is more expedient to be bruised than dead. There is, indeed, a Healer for the man who has stumbled, even He Who on the Cross asked that mercy be shown to His crucifiers, He Who pardoned His murderers while He hung on the Cross. ‘All manner of sin,’ He said, ‘and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men,’ that is, through repentance.”

- Isaac the Syrian, “The Ascetical Homilies of St. Isaac the Syrian”

7. A great deal of our anxiety to make excuses comes from not really believing in [the forgiveness of sins]; from thinking that God will not take us to himself again unless he is satisfied that some sort of case can be made out in our favour. But that would not be forgiveness at all. Real forgiveness means looking steadily at the sin, the sin that is left over without any excuse, after all allowances have been made, and seeing it in all its horror, dirt, meanness and malice, and nevertheless being wholly reconciled to the man who has done it. That, and only that, is forgiveness; and that we can always have from God if we ask for it.

- C.S. Lewis, "On Forgiveness"

Why we believe in the forgiveness of sins:

- While it is nice to feel forgiven, the forgiveness of sins does not refer to an emotion we experience, but rather to being reconciled with God, even after we have abused his creation, other people, and ourselves. Jesus Christ was born on Earth with a mission to proclaim the Father's forgiveness to humans in need, and he proved his divine authority to forgive by his miracles of healing. More dramatically still, the Son of God allowed himself to suffer and die on the cross because of sin, yet he was raised again to life and intercedes for us in heaven. Because of this, we can have confidence that he atoned for the sins of the whole world. This mystery is proclaimed now by his Church and the saints through the Holy Spirit, and will be confirmed again at the final judgement when Jesus comes again in glory.
- On a personal level, forgiveness is graciously available to all those who seek it from God by the means he has provided. We can see the effects in people's lives as a heavy burden of guilt and shame is taken off of them. However, it is a spiritual law that those who are forgiven must in turn forgive others for the wrongs done to them. A person who is unwilling to show mercy to others walls themselves off from the mercy which God wants to show to them.