

Jen and I were discussing a movie trailer we saw the other night.  
 The movie is called "Colombiana,"  
 and is about a young woman,  
 who, after witnessing her parents' murder as a child in Bogota, grows up to be a stone-cold assassin.

The film looks to contain all the necessary elements of a shoot-em up,  
 kill-em up, blow-em up movie.

After the gory 30 second preview,  
 a tag line comes across the screen:  
 "Never forgive, Never forget."

Today,  
 we commemorate the tenth anniversary of the 9/11 tragedy.

Ten years later,  
 there is still a high level of pain and anger.

All week several television stations are running special programs  
 to highlight this anniversary.

They range from a fictional portrayal of a older Christian woman,  
 who has taken in a young muslim boy,  
 to a investigative piece on the children of the victims of 9/11.

Each program is designed to illicit an emotional response;

fear,

pain,

sadness,

anger

etc...

For a good portion of our population,

"Never forgive, Never forget,"

is the mantra of choice.

And while we can never forget loved ones who have gone before us, and the sacrifices others  
 have made to save others' lives,

I'm talking about something else.

These are the individuals that have bumper stickers on their cars that say things like,

"Terrorist Hunting Permit,"

or

"I learned all I need to know about Islam on 9/11."

These slogans are filled with rage

and vengeance.

There is also a sentiment among some,

that if you are not filled with hate,

and supportive of retaliation,

then you condone what happened on 9/11.

This could not be further from the truth.

Let's look at our gospel reading again,

but this time from the Message translation:

<sup>21</sup> At that point Peter got up the nerve to ask,

"Master, how many times do I forgive a brother or sister who hurts me? Seven?"

<sup>22</sup> Jesus replied, "Seven!"

Hardly.

Try seventy times seven.

<sup>23-25</sup> "The kingdom of God is like a king who decided to square accounts with his servants. As he got under way, one servant was brought before him, who had run up a debt of a hundred thousand dollars.

He couldn't pay up, so the king ordered the man, along with his wife, children, and goods, to be auctioned off at the slave market.

<sup>26-27</sup> "The poor wretch threw himself at the king's feet and begged, 'Give me a chance and I'll pay it all back.' Touched by his plea, the king let him off, erasing the debt.

<sup>28</sup> "The servant was no sooner out of the room when he came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him ten dollars. He seized him by the throat and demanded, 'Pay up. Now!'

<sup>29-31</sup> "The poor wretch threw himself down and begged, 'Give me a chance and I'll pay it all back.'

But he wouldn't do it. He had him arrested and put in jail until the debt was paid. When the other servants saw this going on, they were outraged and brought a detailed report to the king.

<sup>32-35</sup> "The king summoned the man and said, 'You evil servant! I forgave your entire debt when you begged me for mercy.

Shouldn't you be compelled to be merciful to your fellow servant who asked for mercy?' The king was furious and put the screws to the man until he paid back his entire debt. And that's exactly what my Father in heaven is going to do to each one of you who doesn't forgive unconditionally anyone who asks for mercy."

The story that Jesus tells his disciples is a difficult one to hear in light of 9/11.

If we take what Jesus says seriously, this means that those individuals that wreaked havoc on our country 10 years ago, must be forgiven.

Now,

one might ask,

"well, doesn't Jesus say we only have to forgive our brothers and sisters, or those who repent?"

Yes, and no.

If we were to take this passage alone,

one might infer that.

However,

given the entire overarching narrative of scripture,

one could make the case that forgiveness is not always based on our repentance.

I think of examples like Joseph with his brothers; he forgave them before they even apologized.

or when Jesus was on the cross dying and cried out to God,

"Father forgive them for they know not what they do."

We all need to repent to God for the things we have done in violation of His law,

but,

when it comes to forgiving other fallen humans,

we must forgive.

The terrorists that killed all those innocent people must repent to God for their actions.

They violated God's law,

so God is the one to whom offense has been made.

Now, let's be clear. This does not mean that people who commit such offenses should not be held accountable to the consequences.

They should certainly be dealt with justly according to the law.

Yet we must be able to forgive.

And not only does this story say that they must be forgiven,

but that we must also be willing to forget!

Listen again to the words of Christ,

"The servant was no sooner out of the room when he came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him ten dollars. He seized him by the throat and demanded, 'Pay up. Now!'

The servant who had been forgiven so much,  
through the forgetting of the debt from his master,  
is unable to do the exact same thing immediately following.

There are a few things I think we need to ponder.

First,

we might have the temptation to say,

well jeez,

I am not saying I'm the best person in the world,

but I didn't fly a plane into the WTC!

According to Holy Scripture,

our sins that we commit on a daily basis,

from gossiping,

to lying,

to pride...

the bible declares that these are no different than killing thousands.

Try to follow me here.

St. Paul in his letter to the church at Rome declares,

“ALL have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”

Jesus in the gospels states,

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ 28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Holy Scripture shows us that there is no way we could ever say we are better than anyone else.

The problem with relativity in issues of sin is that it becomes too convenient and is inaccurate.

Sure,

in relation to someone like Hitler or Osama Bin Laden I am not that bad;

but in relation to someone like mother Theresa,

I am not that good.

And then we hear things from mother Theresa in her journals,

that she too struggled with a life of sin.

She could have declared,

well I am not as bad as Karl,

but I am not as good as Jesus Christ...

which is the exact position we are all in.

Jesus' life, sayings and ministry raises the bar and expectation for all of us.

Based on these verses I can't tell you how many people I have killed...the numbers would be staggering.

The beatitudes show us that even though on one level it looks like we can declare we are not as bad as some others,

the reality is that there is no escaping that we all fall short of the glory of God.

Another thing we must ponder,

is that God has given us the ability to make choices.

Some call this “free-will.”

I think our gospel today challenges that thought as well.

If you can remember all the way back to the beginning of July,

we talked about how God is the all perfect Being,  
because God IS pure Being.  
We were also reminded that we were created in the imago dei,  
the image of God.  
However,  
we later read that through the choices of Adam and Eve,  
we had all been condemned to death,  
and we all feel the effects of that sin,  
in that our natures have been tainted.  
Now,  
God did in fact give us free-will in creation;  
but the moment sin entered the equation,  
we lost free-will.  
St. Augustine teaches that we in fact only live with a free-will when we are in complete  
submission to God and His love.  
Anytime we make a decision and it is not in accordance with the one who created us,  
we are in fact living in complete and utter slavery.  
But the good news is this...  
while we were yet sinners,  
Christ died for us!  
God does not require us to have our acts together in order to be liberated from slavery.  
God tells us that we can have free-will by simply committing our lives to Christ,  
and in living in harmony with Him.  
That is the difference between how the church should be viewing the events of 9/11,  
and the way the rest of the world sees it.  
The church and the Kingdom of God,  
offers Hope.  
They state that even though the world is a mess,  
and that there is violence, pain and suffering,  
it can be rescued!  
The world and media tells us that we need to get revenge,  
to never forgive and never forget;  
Christ says to offer up the other cheek;  
not because we are gluttons for pain,  
but because life in the Kingdom of God is different than in any Kingdom this world has to  
offer.  
It is a life that acknowledges that we all have fallen short of the glory of God,  
and that,  
if not for the grace of God,  
there go I.  
On this day,  
let us not forget that we were just as capable in our sin natures to do something as horrific as  
flying one of those planes,  
and that our world today is like one big world trade center that has been destroyed by evil.  
But,  
because of the love of God,  
we can now instead help to put the pieces back together,  
and show the love and hope that has been shown to us,  
by reconstructing the fallen world,  
with God as the chief architect.

Amen.