

March 3, 2023



Center for Spiritual Development

Daily Reflections

JOURNEYING THROUGH LENT

Photo by Alan Carrillo from Unsplash

BE RECONCILED WITH YOUR BROTHER OR SISTER

By Father David Robinson, SJ

Excerpts from Today's Readings

Thus says the Lord GOD: If the wicked man turns away from all the sins he committed, if he keeps all my statutes and does what is right and just, he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of the crimes he committed shall be remembered against him; he shall live because of the virtue he has practiced. Do I indeed derive any pleasure from the death of the wicked? says the Lord GOD. Do I not rather rejoice when he turns from his evil way that he may live?

EZEKIEL 18:21-23

If you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Reflection

Throughout the centuries, the Hebrew peoples labored to integrate their unfolding relationship with their God into the process of fulfilling the divine initiative they accepted with the responsibilities of a Law that framed their common religious life and social order. This effort required that they blend their personal and communal obedience into their expectations of God's 'will.' Simply put, their behavior was seen as under the direct judgment of God, day by day. When individuals violated the Law, retribution was expected.

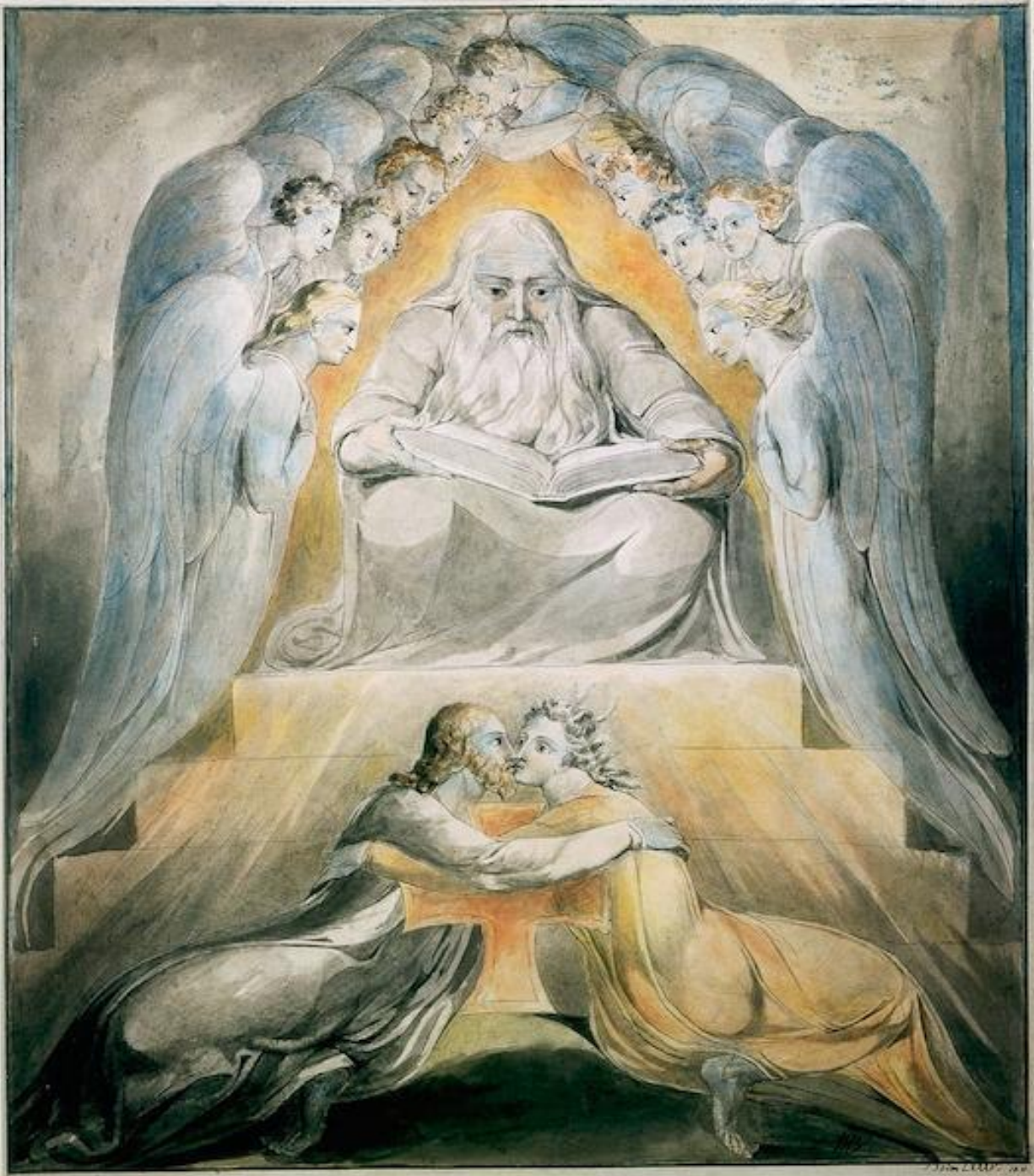
However, the people's growing awareness of their God, whose love and compassion far outweighed any demand for legal 'purity,' showed a contradiction in their original notions of a covenant relationship bound to legal obligations. Through the generations, their teachers and prophets urged a shift in emphasis from a covenant where love depended on legal adherence, to one in which love for God and from God was the blessing through which the people could embrace the Law as a gift for life, not a potential threat of punishment for a failure to comply with each and every mandate (numbered at more than 600!).

The Book of Ezekiel spends a great deal of time enumerating the punishments that were pending for the rebellious people of Judah and Jerusalem, and the foreign nations who failed to recognize the divine call and presence. However, the concluding chapters (40ff.) speak with passionate conviction of God's salvific intentions for the Chosen People. In matters of personal or communal sin, it was not a question of "one and done" for the people. God longs for them to turn back from their wanton ways, and return to the covenant promised to them centuries before. Then the Temple and the city of Jerusalem will be restored, and the tribes of Israel once again reunited. The veil of judgment and retribution will be removed from their midst.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus is encouraging the same sense of redemptive forgiveness among all the people. If they hold one another in contempt or condemnation, they are not free to embrace the forgiving love of God proclaimed by the prophet some five hundred years before. By their judgment of others, they place themselves under a like judgment from God. They cannot receive what they cannot share.

In our own walks of faith, we may feel justified in placing a yoke of judgment upon those whose lives and choices we find harmful or hypocritical. Jesus does not ask us to acquiesce to others' works of evil or malice. However, he does

exhort us to diligently avoid the temptation to cast them into perdition by our own design. We must constantly strive for an openness of soul that gives us the courage and compassion to move to a place of reconciliation at every opportunity. If we can choose to forgive, we abide in the circle of forgiveness that God has intended from the creation of the world.



[Mercy and Truth are Met, Righteousness and Peace have Kissed Each Other](#) Willian Blake Archive, Public Domain, via Wikimedia Commons

For Pondering and Prayer

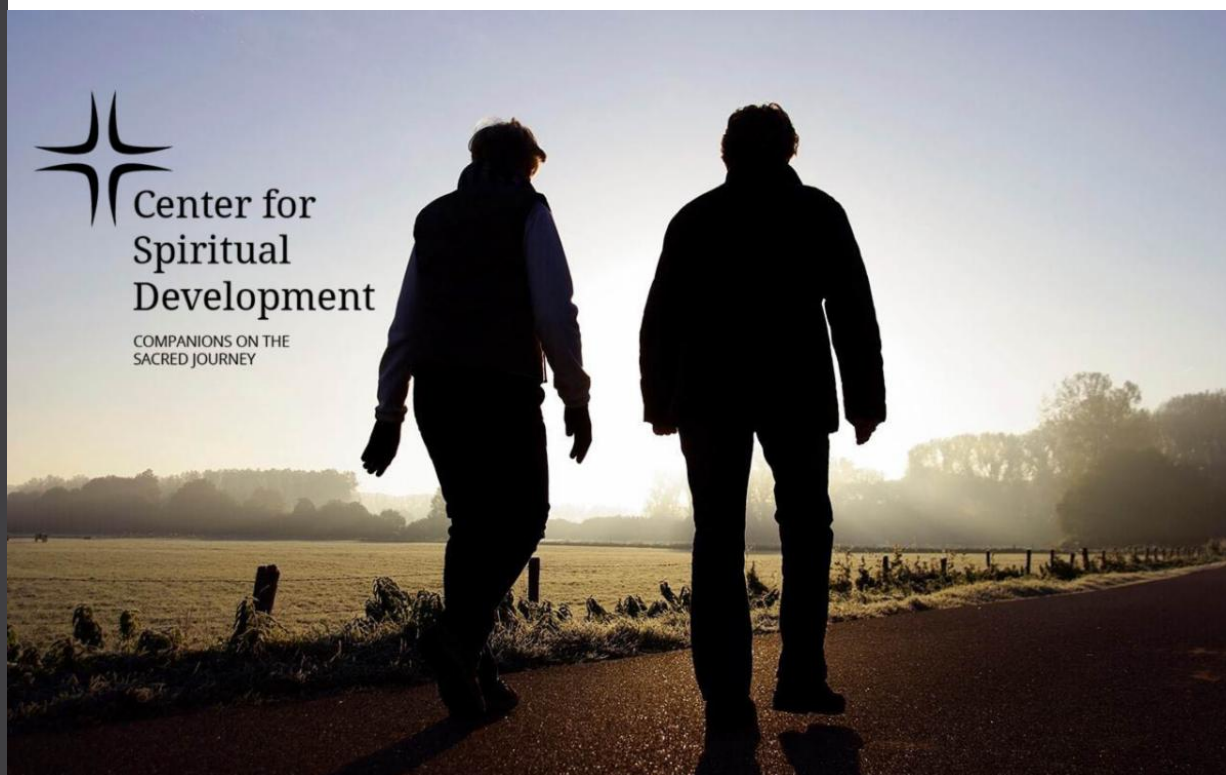
- Are there areas in your life where you feel an inner urgency to discover a

spirit of forgiveness for those who have hurt or angered you?

- What values and experiences in your own spiritual walk help to empower your desire for reconciliation with others?
 - If you could ask one thing of God to strengthen your own compassion for those who seem irreconcilably different from yourself, what would it be?
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