

March 4, 2023



Center for Spiritual Development

Daily Reflections

JOURNEYING THROUGH LENT

Photo by Alan Carrillo from Unsplash

THAT YOU MAY BE CHILDREN OF YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER

By Father David Robinson, SJ

Excerpts from Today's Readings

Moses spoke to the people, saying: "This day the LORD, your God, commands you to observe these statutes and decrees. Be careful, then, to observe them with all your heart and with all your soul. Today you are making this agreement with the LORD: he is to be your God and you are to walk in his ways and observe his statutes, commandments and decrees, and to hearken to his voice. And today the LORD is making this agreement with you: you are to be a people peculiarly his own, as he promised you. . . ."

DEUTERONOMY 26:16-18

Jesus said to his disciples: "You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies, and

pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers and sisters only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same? So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

MATTHEW 5:43-48

Reflection

It seems to be an ingrained element of human character that the decrees or maxims by which we attempt to organize ourselves in familial or communal groups over time become rigid and fixed, existing for themselves alone, and no longer for the higher spiritual aspirations by which they were created. Their worth is measured in the *performance*, not in the *perspective* they bring to our lives and communities. Suddenly, covenant becomes a recipe for perfection, not a refuge of the heart seeking union with God and others. This distinction is highlighted in today’s reading from Deuteronomy. When God exhorts the people to pursue faithful lives under the umbrella of the Law, he does not demand that they grit their teeth and ‘gut it out’ to earn divine favor. Instead, they are invited to: **“observe these statutes and decrees, being careful, then, to observe them with all your heart and with all your soul.”** The core of the covenant since its inception had always been love of God and love of neighbor. That grounding grace is affirmed in the tender words of the prophet.

When Jesus admonishes the disciples to put aside the maxim that taught the faithful: **“You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy,”** he is setting forth the state of the heart that seeks to move in the world with the freedom of the loving: **“I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father.”** This teaching is a stunning presentation of Jesus’ inner embrace of the compassionate soul, capable of holding all with tender grace. Love is never earned; it is inherited within our very humanity. Yet, for centuries, so many Christians have seized upon the mandate: **“Be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect,”** to signify a legislated pattern of behavior and belief that guarantee a completeness of perfection held by God alone. This is born of regulated performance rather than the perspective of a soul illumined by the Spirit who calls us all to the redemptive gaze we encounter day by day in the eyes of God reflected in all the neighbors we are called to love.



[Rembrandt: The Return of the Prodigal Son](#) Public Domain, via Wikimedia Commons

For Pondering

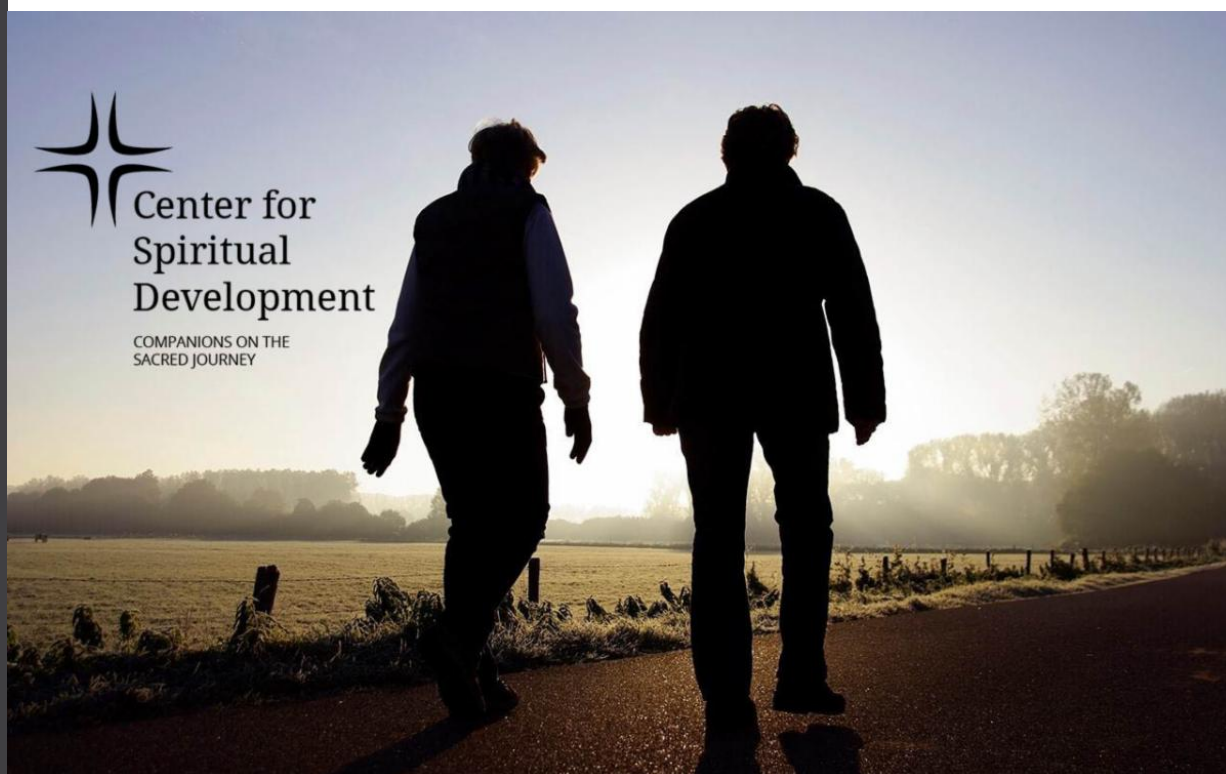
- What do you see as your greatest obstacle to embracing the forgiveness of God in your daily encounters with others?
- Where do you experience the grace of forgiveness in yourself and in your

life with family and community?

- Who are your models of forgiveness as you review the history of the Church and of the saints?

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