

**Pentecost 2 / June 6, 2021**

**Mark 3:28-29**

**“Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin.”**

**“The unforgiveable sin and forgiveness”**

Have you ever worried you may have committed the unforgiveable sin? We all commit sins. We begin worship by confessing our sins and acknowledging our sinfulness! I'm sure we have all committed sins of which we are deeply ashamed and for which we would feel embarrassment and guilt, if they became public knowledge. We pray God to forgive and forget. King David sang, “Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness O Lord.” Another Psalmist sang, “With you there is forgiveness, therefore you are feared.” Unlike people, the Lord forgives and forgets.

But that's not how it is in the world! Sin, however it is defined in the world, is seldom forgiven and never forgotten. Especially in our age, people's sins are remembered, searched out and condemned in various media. People are condemned for things they posted on their social media, fifteen or more years earlier. People suffer embarrassment, loss of social standing and even their jobs, because of things they said and did in the past; even things that were not considered sins at that time. The internet never forgives and it never forgets.

All sin is grievous to the Holy Spirit and offensive to God's holiness, but what sin is so offensive that it can never be forgiven? The sin of the people in today's gospel lesson was their refusal to acknowledge their sin and see Jesus as their Saviour. Their sin was blasphemy, attributing the work of the Holy Spirit to the devil and calling Jesus the devil's servant. Their sin was unforgiveable, because it was a refusal to accept the gift of forgiveness the Spirit seeks to give everyone through faith in Jesus as Saviour. The work of the Holy Spirit is to bring forgiveness to our spirits, by opening our hearts to faith in Jesus; in whom there is forgiveness of every sin in time and for eternity!

The essence of God is love and His greatest attribute from our perspective, is forgiveness. Therefore, it is surprising and unsettling to hear Jesus say there is one sin that will never be forgiven in time or for eternity; blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. He says, “Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin.” What makes this sin so terrible that it will not be forgiven in time or eternity? Humans judge sin according to its effect on others. The more harm a sin causes, the greater the judgement against it. Some sins are so enormous they are considered crimes against humanity.

God sees sin differently. Certainly, God also views sin according to its effect on other people and so justice is proportionate to the crime. But in God's eyes all sin is an offense that brings death. Adam and Eve's sin seems small in the eyes of the world---they ate some fruit---but its effect was enormous. It destroyed their relationship with God and brought death to themselves and to the creation. But again, no matter how insignificant or serious the sin is in the eyes of humans, with God there is forgiveness.

Quite simply the sin against the Holy Spirit is the persistent refusal to receive the forgiveness He offers all to receive in Christ Jesus. It is the continuous resistance to the gospel call, through which the Spirit seeks to open our hearts to faith in Jesus and the forgiveness God gives through Him. Consider Judas! Judas betrayed Jesus. That was an enormous sin, but even that sin was forgivable. The sin that was unforgiveable was not coming to Jesus for forgiveness. Peter also sinned against the Holy Spirit when he denied Jesus three times in the courtyard of the high priest. The difference was that Peter allowed the Spirit to console him with forgiveness for the sake of Christ Jesus. Jesus came to save sinners. He gave Himself for the sin of the world. He offers forgiveness for everyone. All who respond to the Holy Spirit in faith, receive forgiveness in time and life in eternity.

We all sin and grieve the Holy Spirit. Sin against the Holy Spirit takes many forms. The Spirit works faith in Jesus through the word. Treating God's word lightly or with contempt, is sin against the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit works faith and gives forgiveness and life through baptism into the death and resurrection of Jesus. Treating baptism merely as a human work, failing to return to its promise in repentance and refusing to receive its benefits in absolution, are sins against the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit nourishes and nurtures our faith through the gift of forgiveness received in Christ's holy body and precious blood. Seeing the sacrament as nothing more than bread and wine, failing to discern the body of Christ, not feeling the need to receive its blessings and benefits, are sins against the Holy Spirit. We sin against the Holy Spirit when we separate ourselves from the Church. The Church

is the body of Christ on earth, in which He dwells through His Spirit. All these are sins which grieve the Holy Spirit. Yet all these are forgiven when we heed to Spirit's call and come to Jesus in faith!

The Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of life! The Spirit gives life to all creation. Psalm 104 sings, "When you send forth your Spirit you renew the face of the ground." The Spirit calls people to life through faith in Christ as Saviour. The Spirit gives eternal life to all who receive Christ as Saviour. The Spirit opens our eyes to see our sin, so that we see that we need this Saviour. Consider the day of Pentecost! On that day, the Holy Spirit convicted three thousand people of sin through the law and raised them to spiritual life by the gospel of forgiveness, through faith in Jesus and baptism in His Name. All those people had sinned against the Holy Spirit, by their unbelief and previous rejection of Jesus as the Christ. All those people were forgiven when they stopped resisting the Holy Spirit and allowed Him to open their hearts to receive Jesus as Saviour through the gospel. The Holy Spirit works to overcome our resistance to the gospel and give us spiritual rebirth through faith in Jesus.

The sin against the Holy Spirit is not a type of sin, as much as it is a quality of sinfulness. The sin against the Holy Spirit is the essence of sin; unbelief and rebellion against the will of God. It is unforgiveable, as long as people resist the Spirit in their lives. It is forgiven when people stop resisting and allow the Spirit to open their hearts to receive Christ as Saviour. The day Jesus was condemned a large crowd shouted, "Let Him be crucified." The Roman Governor sought to relieve himself of responsibility saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood, see to it yourselves." The people replied, "His blood be on us and on our children." That was sin against the Holy Spirit! But the Spirit continued to work. Even from the cross Jesus prayed, "Father forgive them."

Six weeks later the Holy Spirit convicted many of those people of their sin. When they realized they had rejected the Saviour and condemned the Christ, they cried out to Peter and the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do." Peter said, "Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sin and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For this promise is for you and for your children." They stopped resisting. The Holy Spirit created faith in their hearts and more than three thousand were baptized. The Holy Spirit leads us to Jesus and opens our hearts to believe in His name that we would receive forgiveness and life through Him.

In Ephesians chapter four St. Paul writes, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." We should not grieve the Holy Spirit with sin, we should honour Him with our lives! We honour the Holy Spirit by following as He leads us to Jesus. We honour the Holy Spirit, by allowing Him to lead us into the Scriptures; for they bear witness to Christ our Saviour. We honour the Holy Spirit, by making frequent and faithful use of the sacraments; believing that in them we receive the forgiveness that Jesus earned through His sinless life and sacrificial death. We honour the Holy Spirit, by opening our lips in prayer, praise and thanksgiving for His many blessings and benefits.

We honour the Holy Spirit, by seeking His blessings in the lives of others; especially that they would come to faith and grow in knowledge of the Lord Jesus. We honour the Holy Spirit, by asking Him to open our hearts to the needs of others, that we may bear one another's burdens and forgive each other from the heart; even as God forgives us from the heart of His love in Christ Jesus. We honour the Holy Spirit, by returning to the promise of our baptism when we sin; not despairing of forgiveness, but remembering God's promise to cleanse us of its stain and guilt and forgive us fully and freely for the sake of Jesus.

The Holy Spirit open our hearts through the gospel, make our hearts His home and keep us in Christ Jesus, until He raises us from the dust of death to share in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In Jesus' name. Amen