

I like to touch slugs. That sounds weird, but when I see a big, five inch-long banana slug slowly slithering across the sidewalk I sometimes bend down and lightly tap the slug on the head. I don't hurt the slug (unlike some of you who salt them!), but it always recoils at my touch. Its antlers draw in – and as I gently poke it its whole body contracts into more of a stubby football shape. I think it's kind of cool to watch.

As I said, that might seem weird, but I reminded of those recoiling slugs when I think of how we human beings react to sin. It's not very flattering, but many of us interiorly resemble a slug that has felt that unwanted human contact of sin and pain. We recoil into a little ball. It's hard for us to forgive. In fact, forgiving those who have hurt us in the past is one of the most difficult things to do in the spiritual life. An inability to forgive blocks many of us from growing in the Lord. I would like to preach about that today.

In our Gospel we hear Jesus tell us, His Disciples, "When someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one to him as well. If

anyone wants to go to law with you over your tunic, hand him your cloak as well. Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go with him for two miles . . . love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you . . . be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

If we have nobody to forgive that all sounds beautiful. But if we are contracted into that little ball by our hurt we ask, “How can we do those things?” It can seem impossible to love our enemies if we have truly been hurt or abused.

But notice that in this teaching Jesus is actually describing what He Himself will experience and do during His own Passion. He will be struck in the face, and not retaliate. He will be pressed to carry that Cross. His tunic and cloak will both go to His executioners. And then He will forgive them and pray for them from the Cross.

My point is that Jesus does not recoil from our sin. He does not withdraw from it. He does not change shape like a slug when he feels the impact of human sinfulness, whether that’s the blows and jeering

of the Sanhedrin, the nails of the Romans, or the betrayal of Judas and Peter, or my own sins. And that's amazing when you think about it. Let us think about our own sins. There is a whole, long list of hurtful things we have done in our past – and present. But Jesus still prays for us to the Father. We don't have to become perfect before we can say to God, "There, I think I'm good enough for you to love now." Jesus forgives us from the cross.

So let us turn to our own lives. We often do have trouble forgiving from the cross. Maybe we have heard these words from the Sermon on the Mount before. Maybe we believe them intellectually. But they don't free us from the pain of the past. We have said, "I forgive you." But it hasn't healed us.

My point is that it's not a matter of our trying harder, of trying to repeat those words "I forgive you" again and again, trying to make certain feelings come. Instead, it's a matter of letting Jesus do it for us, and in us, by letting Jesus coming into our lives more deeply. If you

have someone to forgive – an incident or wound from the past that blocks you - try praying like this sometime soon . . .

Clear out some time for private prayer. After a few moments of quiet, imagine that person and incident where you were hurt. Imagine the scene. Perhaps it's painful to do. But try. I bet you have done it many times before anyway. But this time ask the Holy Spirit to enter your memory and wound. Then into the middle of the scene and memory let Jesus come walking in. Look at Him and see what He looks like. More important, see how He is looking at you. Just sit there with His presence in the memory and ask Him to bring His power of forgiveness to it. See what happens. Talk to Him. When Jesus enters a memory in prayer He can heal it – that is what forgiveness feels like.

We can't do the heavy lifting of forgiving. We need Jesus to do it for us. That is what this prayer is about. Jesus doesn't recoil from the touch of our sin. When Jesus preaches the Sermon on the Mount what He is really saying to us is, "This sounds hard, doesn't it? You can't do it.

So, let me into your life so I can do it for you. I have proven to you that I can. I died on the Cross living out my teaching. I can do that in your life as well, if you'll let me."

It sounds hard to call us human beings slugs. I just mean by the analogy that many of us are rolled up in hard little balls from our contact with sin. But when I touch slugs in that mild form of slug-harassment, I then wait and watch. Eventually the slugs trust there is no more threat and they return to their happy banana shape and start sliding again. Forgiveness will let us do that, as well. If we can pray for Jesus to enter into our past and heal it, eventually that will relax our guard and we will stretch out to our real shape and glory as beloved children of God, because when Jesus is in us and lives in us we can become perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect.