

## A NOTE FROM FATHER EICKHOFF

Let us speak today of the gift of virtue. The virtues are spiritual weapons given to us by God for our benefit. We should strive to cultivate all the virtues in our lives so that we might resist the assaults of temptation towards committing sin. Every great Christian virtue is said to have an opposing vice that would lead us to commit evil actions. As hope is one of the great Christian virtues, so too is despair one of the greatest weapons of the enemy of God. The First Reading from the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel and the Gospel reading from Matthew today both rely on this observation.

Both readings remind us that there is no moment during our lives here on Earth during which we can say:

“There is no point in my seeking out the forgiveness of God. My sins are so great and so numerous that they cannot be forgiven; nor can I make up for having committed them if I lived for a thousand more years.”

This statement is the counsel of despair speaking to us and it is to be resisted with all our strength. Instead, we should listen to the Word of God who teaches us to have hope in the mercy and forgiveness of God. Even more, we should remind ourselves that God’s mercy and forgiveness are not the same as the human concepts that we know. Among us human beings mercy and forgiveness are often conditional or partial things. We might forgive if someone does a certain action for us or our mercy is often half-hearted. With God however mercy and forgiveness are complete and absolute actions. They are not dependent upon meeting some goal over the next year or ten years. Instead, we receive the fullness of God’s mercy and forgiveness at the moment of repentance and absolution of our sins.

The counsel of doubt and despair wielded by the evil one tries to convince us that some sins, some actions are so terrible that they cannot be forgiven. This is not so. The virtue of hope teaches us that no sin, no action no matter how grave is beyond the power of the infinite God to forgive. This same hope speaks to us that God, who is not some distant and remote figure who cares little or nothing about us human beings, but rather has sent His Son into the world for the sole purpose of showing mercy upon us human beings because of His care and concern for us, earnestly desires to reconcile us to Himself. We should always keep in mind that the only time limit on God’s mercy and forgiveness is our last moment of life here on Earth. Up until that moment we can seek out God and ask for pardon and forgiveness. This should be a great relief to us. This should also give us a reason to practice the virtue of hope at all times so that we don’t squander the opportunity to seek out God’s mercy and forgiveness.

Yours in Christ,

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Pastor