

Keeping it Clean

There are few things more beautiful than a clean conscience. If our conscience is burdened with guilt, regret, or remorse, there is no place to run or hide. No amount of worldly pleasure, success or happiness can assuage a burdened conscience. But, if our conscience is clear, we experience a freedom and joy of living that is indescribable. And, for this reason, Christ was willing to be crucified - to set us free from the weight of guilt in our lives. Good Friday is good indeed if we are willing to embrace all that God has provided for us in Jesus. Otherwise, Good Friday is just another day.



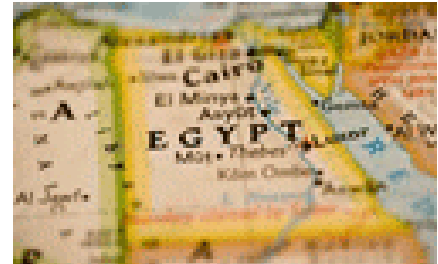
No one values freedom more than God. He is all about freedom. He wants every single person in his creation to be free. But, there is only one path to true freedom, and that is for us to participate through faith in the death and resurrection of his son. Before we burst into the beauty of spring and summer this week, and make plans to enjoy being outdoors again, can we take a moment during this Easter weekend to examine our own consciences? Are there things that are still weighing us down, causing us to move slowly through the day, sometimes with heavy hearts? God would love to relieve us of those burdens if we would only receive the gifts he has provided for us.

Keeping our consciences clean is a daily task. The only issue is whether we will take the time to attend to these kinds of matters, or whether we will continue to race through the day in pursuit of seemingly more important affairs. What daily or weekly practice do you have of confessing your sins, or forgiving someone who has sinned against you? Or, do you think confession is an ancient practice that has nothing to do with the modern world today? Confession does not necessarily need to be performed in front of a priest, minister or counselor; on the contrary; all we need to do is simply shut the door, close our eyes and confess our sins directly to God through Christ. Doing it on a regular basis is what increasingly sets us free and gives us a hope and peace beyond description. For these reasons, the Apostle Paul wrote the following words to his disciple, Timothy; "Timothy, my son, here are my instructions for you, based on the prophetic words spoken about you earlier. May they help you fight well in the Lord's battles. Cling to your faith in Christ, and keep your conscience clear. For some people have deliberately violated their consciences; as a result, their faith has been shipwrecked." (1Timothy 1:18-19)

Forgiveness is the key to life. It is a free gift, which we can neither manufacture, buy, nor sell on our own. We can only receive it through faith. We must be

forgiven. Forgiving ourselves is not possible. When we are forgiven by our Creator, our souls sing a new song of joy.

In recent months, I have been told the spiritual climate in Egypt has changed significantly. For the first time ever in all of Egyptian history, some Muslims who now follow Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior have been preaching openly in the streets about their newfound liberty. From the 7th century until the 21st century, this was a practice absolutely forbidden and punishable as a grave crime under Egyptian law. But the Egyptian law has changed recently, and people are now miraculously free to express themselves publicly in these regards. I have heard there is one former Muslim terrorist in Cairo who is now preaching the Good News of Christ on street corners, attracting increasingly larger crowds. They say he has a following of 300 to 500 people who seek his counsel on a regular basis. He preaches about forgiveness - that Christ has forgiven him for all his past transgressions -in the same spirit Moses, David and the Apostle Paul were forgiven for their past, highly publicized sins. These kinds of new realities are history in the making beyond our wildest imagination for the Arab world! The Gospel is not waning in the Middle East; it is waxing!



It seems that almost every week, we read in newspapers about a new phenomenal statement coming from Pope Francis. Last month, he said that people who have experienced the pain of divorce should be accompanied, not condemned by the Church or Christian friends. He said, "When love fails, because many times it fails, we have to feel the pain of the failure; and we must accompany those people who have had this failure in their love. Walk with them, and help them heal." The last thing we need to do with someone who has been divorced is heap shame and judgment on top of the pain that is already there from the loss of the marriage.



Pope Francis

It is the Easter story that reminds us there is new life beyond our shortcomings and failures, provided we confess our sins, and follow the resurrected Jesus as our Lord. Over half of marriages today end in divorce. Francis says the Church should be a place of healing, not pain; that it should be a "field hospital after battle." In summary, he said, "The thing the Church needs most today is to heal wounds, to warm the hearts of the faithful."

Forgiveness is a gift. It was made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus dying on the cross for the sake of our sins. God did not need to go to such great lengths to provide for humanity; but that is how much he loves us, and wants to throw his

arms around us in his healing embrace. He atoned for our estrangement from Him, and our daily transgressions from his will for our lives. What can possibly be more valuable in this life than being freed from the errors and burdens of our past?

Easter is a gift waiting to be opened by those who choose to receive it. Listen to these words Christ spoke after his resurrection to the Apostle John, "Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends." (Revelation 3:20-21).

Good Friday would be a good day to deal with a burdened conscience - a good day to wipe it clean. He has risen. He has risen indeed! Praise be to God for the freedom he brings. Lots of love from my family to yours during this special time of year.