



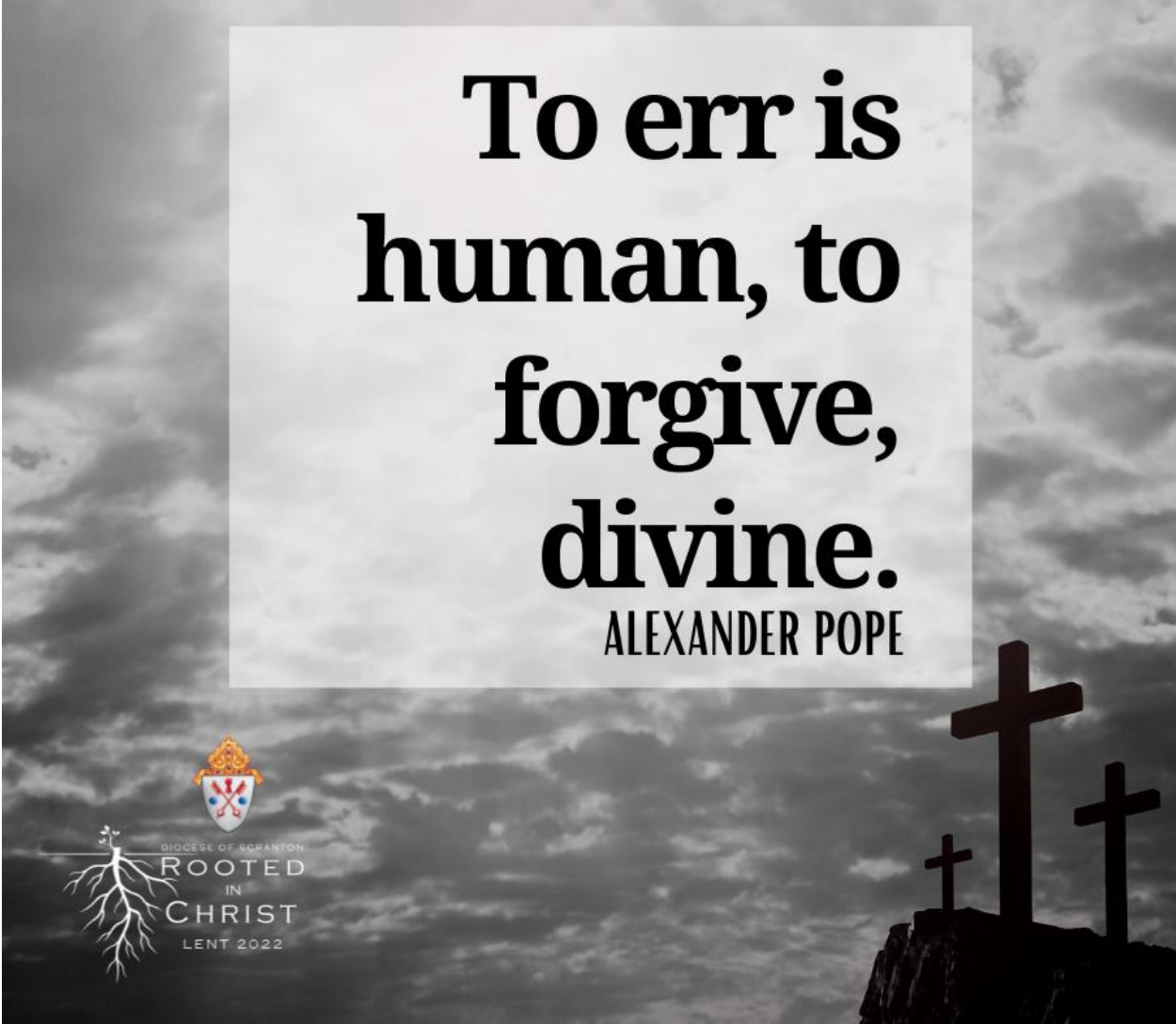
DIOCESE OF SCRANTON

ROOTED IN CHRIST

LENT 2022



FORGIVING *Friday*



**To err is
human, to
forgive,
divine.**
ALEXANDER POPE



Holding On Until You Are Ready to Forgive

My faith journey hasn't been without adversity or trouble, which was many times caused by my own lack of maturity earlier on. As I matured, however, I realized during so many instances that the Lord was truly with me, and although I struggled with maintaining my relevance with culture and the ideas of present day and being Catholic, it wasn't until recently that I came to the understanding that the path to Him is not only narrow, but also counter-cultural. I think this is where I've "grown up" in my faith, by understanding and reconciling with the idea that there are just some things that I – as a Catholic woman – should not do because they pull me away

from the Lord. I can explain this more within the context of my experiences with present-day politics in the U.S. because it is a space in which I feel my faith has been tested over and over.

Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. Joshua 1:9

During the early days of the pandemic, like most people, I became glued to my device. From the news to my newsfeeds on social media, I just wanted to know as much as I could to make sure I could keep my family safe. As the days passed, however, my time on social media exponentially increased, and my interest was less about the news and more about the politics and what people were saying or not saying. I began voicing my opinions, which seemed to be sharply contrasted to some of the opinions I was seeing from my groups of real-life friends. My challenge was in understanding them, as much as it was in wanting to be understood. It took about a year and several severed friendships to realize just how damaging social media, politics, and the media can be on our hearts and our souls; I saw not only my friendships but others' relationships suffer similar consequences as a result of misconstrued perceptions. I was hurt; I didn't sever those relationships. These were choices made by those people because they didn't like my views. I eventually convinced myself it was ok to not be liked or even appreciated by everyone, but that came at the cost of painful interactions.

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The most difficult part of this experience was actually receiving backlash from fellow Catholics; and this was not just backlash. No. This was judgment – the kind one believes they'll receive at the end of life. I was judged for my views; I was told I could not call myself a Catholic because of my views. I was told that I was wrong for my beliefs and that I would be condemned for them. I was criticized and even mistreated by people, who, in my opinion, were behaving more like the Pharisees and less like

followers of Christ. It was a hard pill to swallow, even though I am grateful for all of it now. This experience, alone, pushed me to delve deeper into my faith. It forced me to take a look at myself, my behaviors, and thoughts, to ask the Holy Spirit for guidance and for the ability to discern. And, while it fortified some of my ideas because I knew that they were based on Catholic social teaching, others seemed less important and less relevant to the path I needed to be on. In turn, it also changed my ideas about judgment. I was judging others just as much as they were judging me.

This is where things changed for me.

This is where things changed for me. I want to preface this by stating that it is completely liberating to not be responsible for judging others – to not be the person who condemns people. When you know your place, and you know it's not your job, it allows you to see others in a very different light. You begin to see that we are all flawed, but in the same token, have the spark of the Spirit inside of us, which gives us the potential to turn toward God and seek to follow Him, rather than the narrative of today. I came to the understanding that my judgment is – by its very nature – completely imperfect, and that it becomes a barrier to truly loving others as God loves us. In the same vein, it also opened my eyes to forgiveness – forgiveness of myself for my flaws and my transgressions, and for others. I think the most important takeaway I have from this entire experience is that all of this – the non-judging, the loving, the forgiveness, following the narrow path to Jesus, having views that are countercultural and even counter to some popularly held Catholic predications that are based on perception and not the Catechism or doctrine – takes nurturing and constant work. It takes consistent and intentional prayer and gratitude. It takes reflective practice. It takes listening when the Holy Spirit speaks to you. It takes understanding one's own Catholic identity and knowing who we serve, above all and FIRST – above government and flawed leaders, above the fads of the day. When we understand that we are Catholic first – before our ideologies – our identity becomes radically and unmitigatingly tied to our Creator, and our decisions follow suit.

What we do with the Truth, once we know it, is entirely up to us.

Being a Catholic is not easy, but it's not hard either. It is the reward we look for at the end, however, that makes it the only path for us. And hopefully, along the way, our identity is used to inspire others to seek God in the same way, because we are called to serve Him as his hands and feet on earth. By His design, we are intelligent and compassionate; by His design, we are free to make choices based upon the information we have at the moment. By His design, we are also judged according to our level of knowledge and understanding of the Truth. What we do with the Truth, once we know it, is entirely up to us.

I pray that the Holy Spirit helps us each to discern our path to the Lord, and that we experience it with the Love, Forgiveness, and Humility we need to walk in His footsteps, especially during this holy season of Lent.

Ivet Bandirma is the Youth Minister & Faith Formation Assistant at Queen of Peace in Hawley, PA. When Ivet is not at the parish, she is showing others her gift of Calligraphy, Hand Engraving and Design. As if that did not keep Ivet busy enough, she also works as an Organizational Psychologist. Ivet is Mom to two beautiful boys.

FOR REFLECTION

- **What characteristics in your life might indicate that you haven't fully forgiven past hurts, even if you know in your head what you need to do?**
- **Is your reaction to hurt or offense in your life an attempt to seek revenge?**
- **What is your initial reaction to the concept of forgiveness?**

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Diocese of Scranton
2021 **DIOCESAN**
ANNUAL APPEAL 
