

# Forgiving's easy, except our enemies

By JAMES K. HEALY

Antoine Adrien is more than friend and confrere to me. He's my inspiration. In the tortured reality of his beloved Haiti, he keeps the prophet/dream alive and lifts the hearts of the discouraged. We count on him for that. But that night last September when I heard of the tragic liturgy he had celebrated — his friend, Antoine Ismery, dragged from the church and shot dead in the street — I was slow to call and share his pain.

I wasn't ready to deal with Antoine's grief. It might disturb the homily I had ready for the morning. Sirach warns, "The vengeful will suffer the Lord's vengeance." Jesus tells Peter: "Not seven times but seventy times seven must you forgive." I would put that to the people. If it offended some, that would be their problem. My job is to preach the word. I was comfortable enough to pose the challenge to forgiveness. Until I heard about Ismery's death.

When I called, Antoine was asleep. He'd said he felt his very body and spirit had been crushed. I was secretly glad he was asleep. His Eucharist was desecrated by violence and murder.

Would I have dared remind him that even for these murderous thugs there must be forgiveness? Of course he had no need of exegesis from me. If the gospel seemed a mockery for the moment, he'd come to terms with it. We count on him for that.

But what about us? Why do our politicians risk political suicide if they take a stand against capital punishment? What does our bitter spirit of retribution against criminals tell us about us? Can we admit that, blessed though we are, we are a vengeful people, determined to get our pound of flesh?

How many of us wallow in recriminations after divorce? How many house-

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hold hatreds thrive in our hearts? How many who have lost jobs to the politics and profit of others now live in bitterness, longing for the chance to get even? We are so easily at home with angry, vengeful thoughts. We are so foreign to forgiveness. We love a hurt; we can use it as a weapon. How can this be in a people so lavishly forgiven by God? Perhaps

we'd have to share it.

It's as if we are in a brightly lit room with our eyes firmly shut. The light is God's unconditioned forgiveness. The light is on, as sure as the sun is in the sky, but God won't force our eyes open. And we won't open our eyes because we can't stand the sight of all those people who hurt us bathed in the same light.

Jesus is compassion. Jesus forgives everybody, including those who nailed him to the cross. To his Father he said, "Forgive them," and to us, "My Father will treat you like the vindictive servant unless each of you forgives every brother and sister from your heart."

We were spared the terrible challenge of a liturgy turned to terror and murder before our eyes. But we must see more clearly that every Eucharist is a murder turned to triumph and forgiveness. Now we must realize that Antoine's challenge that sad September day is simply our common challenge made especially graphic and dramatic. The Eucharist is the sacred signing of our common burden.

In a world so bitter and angry, we must celebrate Eucharist and let the healing light of God's forgiveness break through the shadow of the cross. It is in this light God speaks: "I forgive."

To see it, to believe it, to know it, to feel it, to be part of it, we must first open our eyes. "Let those who have eyes see." ■



at last it is a matter of belief.

As Christians we believe in the mysteries of incarnation, trinity, Eucharist and resurrection, but our deeds betray us as a people not yet convinced of the mystery of unearned redemption. We are able — even determined — to cling to our resentments, our well-nourished and heartfelt hatreds and old hurts. And why is this so? Because we have not yet dared believe in the forgiveness of our God. Because, if we really believed it,

## U.S. accused in delay of Aristide's restoration

Supporters of exiled Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide say the Clinton administration's recent actions regarding Haiti are delaying implementation of last July's Governor's Island accords.

The Agency for International Development-funded Center for Democracy recently brought Haitian parliamentarians to Washington in an attempt to involve Aristide in new negotiations. This included consideration of the administration's request that a new prime minister be named to succeed Robert Malval.

Sr. Mary Healy, executive director of the Washington Office on Haiti, complained that the administration keeps delaying. "They've used the (January) Miami meeting, now they've used the parliamentarians," she said. "They keep trying to get Aristide to 'broaden the government' as if that alters the Haitian setting. In reality, the only setting for his return is the removal of the military."

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