

EPISODE 4: HEALING IN THE FAMILY

Opening Prayer

St. Augustine's Prayer to the Holy Spirit

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy.

Act in me, O Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy.

Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit, that I love but what is holy.

Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy.

Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit, that I always may be holy. Amen.

Begin with a few moments of silent recollection.

Understanding the Breach

- 1) This episode would be necessary even if we were in a deeply Christian, family-friendly society. The biggest wounds in family life come from sin. We hurt each other. This is a fundamental reality.
 - a. *If comfortable, share an experience of hurt from your family when you were growing up.*
 - b. *What has brought healing in your life from this hurt, or is it still quite present?*
 - c. *What was your experience of forgiveness in your family as a child. Was forgiveness offered and given regularly?*

- 2) Throughout the video, a sharp contrast is drawn between the heart formed by the world and the heart forgiven and formed by Christ and His Church
 - a. *Julie Alexander shares the painful moment where she and her husband announced their divorce, with “cold hearts” at the time, assuming counseling would be enough for their*

children. How does the issue of the “cold heart” strike you. Can you relate?

b. For the Alexanders, and for the featured witness couple in this episode, the Conklins and their story of financial trouble and collapsing self-reliance, the way back to peace, and even to thriving marriages was faith, forgiveness, and knowing the teaching of the Church. Can you relate to such an encounter and conversion in your own life? How did you move from the experience of sin and brokenness to a place of healing? What specific things did you do or experience which allowed you to move forward?

3) In *Complete My Joy*, Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted’s document written to spouses and parents, he recounts an image of hope from his time raised on a farm: “What is broken becomes stronger (than its original condition) once healed. I think of the broken equipment on our family farm, which after having been repaired by the welder’s torch, *was stronger in the place of welding than ever before, and would not break in the same place again.*”

a. Does this ring true for you? What is the implication for us as hurting and/or healed individuals and as families here?

Bricks for the Breach

“The family has the mission to guard, reveal and communicate love. This is why the family has been under attack because this is the bedrock where people are formed. Healthy people help heal and restore others. And this is what the family does is create this dynamic where you have people that can go out and heal and bring life to the world.” (Dr. Carrie Gress)

“When people ask me, What’s the number one thing that’s breaking marriages apart, I’d say it’s selfishness. And I also think there’s a lack of virtue in marriage and family life today, a lack of virtues like honesty, humility, courage, patience, perseverance – that when are practiced, make marriage and family life wonderful.” (Dr. Peter Kleponis)

“We were at the place of no hope and complete despair when we called our two kids in the room and told them we were going to divorce. They were huddled in the corner, crying their eyes out. Our hearts were so cold. I can remember thinking, ‘Oh, they’ll be fine. We’ll just send them to counseling.’” (Julie Alexander)

“When somebody is trying to overcome a habitual sin, or a vice, some practical things I would tell them is – number one, you didn’t get into this in a day, you’re not getting get out of this in a day. It’s probably going to be a struggle, a fight. Also, you cannot do it alone. You need grace. It’s hard to be good. If you don’t think that’s true, try being good. Then you realize, ‘Oh, this is not easy.’” (Fr. John Parks)

“(The) issue was financial. That was the start of it. But with that financial came me hiding it. Lying to my wife to cover up where we were financially. That was the crux that got it going. My whole thing was, ‘I can take care of this.’” (Bob Conklin)

“I didn’t understand why he had lied to me over and over again. And so, I got in the car and drove around the country roads screaming my head off, at God. At one point, I said, ‘What am I supposed to do with this?’ I heard a voice saying, ‘Go home and love your husband unconditionally.’ And I said, ‘You’re gonna have to do it through me.’ He was kneeling down in the room, and I knelt down, and we cried and cried. And I said, ‘I don’t understand any of this, but I’m not going anywhere.’” (Theresa Conklin)

“It’s not surprising that a lot of households struggle with addictions and compulsions, that a lot of households struggle with violence and hostility, that a lot of households struggle with depression and apathy, that they struggle with materialism and envy and ambition, that they struggle with insignificance because they lost sight. And the world is constantly trying to obscure to forfeit, to counterfeit, to replace, to diminish, to extinguish what the Church teaches.” (Fr. Mark Salas)

“So many of us, we didn’t come from the ideal families, we had brokenness in our own lives, there’s things like abuse and neglect, and all those things. They happen. But I think that’s the beautiful thing is that that’s not the last word in our lives.” (Dr. Carrie Gress)

“Forgiveness is critically important in life and especially in relationships, because without forgiveness, you cannot move forward. There are studies that show when people do not forgive, they suffer physically, spiritually, mentally. Forgiveness is releasing the other person who caused hurt and pain, and giving it all to God surrendering it to Jesus Christ.” (Julie Alexander)

“I don’t think forgiveness is hard, so much as I think it’s impossible by our own power. We need grace to forgive. So, I would beg God to give me the grace to forgive.” (Fr. John Parks)

“God created us without us: but he did not will to save us without us.”¹¹⁶ To receive his mercy, we must admit our faults. “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1847)

Sword of the Spirit

GIVING AND RECEIVING FORGIVENESS

Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34)

“If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you.” (Matthew 6:14)

Then Peter approaching asked him, “Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus answered, “I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times. (Matthew 18:21-22)

Call to Battle

1. **Monthly Confession as a family.** Consider beginning to go monthly to the Sacrament of Confession as a family. Set aside a time that works best and make the sacrifice to have sins completely removed through absolution and penance. Go together. When a child sees his parents in line, humbly and regularly, awaiting this sacramental moment of forgiveness, the lesson is clear: mom and dad have sinned too, and they are sorry; they and I need this healing and freedom from sin.
2. **Parents, demonstrate forgiveness and apology.** Consider adding an annual family ritual where, beginning with the father and mother, the family asks for and receives forgiveness for the ways we may have hurt each other during the year. (This does not replace the need to forgive and ask forgiveness regularly, but will emphasize mercy in a memorable way in the family.) Connect this ritual to a loved family meal. This is very powerful. Some ideas:

- a. On New Year's Day, January 1, the *Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God*: begin the new year with a new beginning of forgiveness in your relationships. Around the table, beginning with Dad, then Mom, go around and speak about what you love about your spouse and each child. Share, appropriately, things you would like to ask forgiveness for with each person. Finish with a hug for each person.
 - b. On Holy Thursday, the day we remember Jesus defining leadership by humbling himself and washing the feet of his disciples, do the same. Begin with Dad, then Mom, then each of the older siblings. After washing a family member's feet, whisper words of honor and love as well as things for which you are sorry. Ask forgiveness. Play uplifting music in the background to keep conversations private. Forgive one another and head into the Passion and Resurrection of Christ with renewed relationships.
3. **If addictions, attachments or forms of mental or spiritual illness are presently crippling your family's ability to love, prioritize freedom from these obstacles.** Seek counsel and take appropriate and assertive steps to address the problem and heal.
- a. These are areas which usually call for professional help, and appropriate means for addressing the problem can range from individual counseling, to group accountability support, to full-on family intervention and hospitalization. The Church's ministry of exorcism may in some instances also be needed.
 - b. While non-Catholic professionals can certainly be helpful, those with faith have important insights and an awareness of the infinite grace and mercy of God, as well as the crucial grace provided by the Sacraments. Your parish staff, or Diocesan family life office should have recommendations for you on where to begin.

- c. Diocesan-approved Healing Masses offered at parishes may be available as well. These can be very powerful moments of experiencing Christ's healing.

Closing Prayer

Request intentions from the group, and then pray the Prayer for the Family to close:

Prayer for the Family from St. John Paul II

*Lord God, from You every family in heaven
and on earth takes its name.*

Father, You are Love and Life.

*Through Your Son, Jesus Christ, born of woman,
and through the Holy Spirit, fountain of divine charity,
grant that every family on earth may become
for each successive generation a true shrine of life and love.*

*Grant that Your grace may guide the thoughts and actions
of husbands and wives for the good of their families
and of all the families in the world.*

*Grant that the young may find in the family
solid support for their human dignity and
for their growth in truth and love.*

*Grant that love, strengthened by the grace of
the sacrament of marriage, may prove mightier than all the
weakness and trials through which our families sometimes pass.*

*Through the intercession of the Holy Family of Nazareth,
grant that the Church may fruitfully carry out
her worldwide mission in the family and through the family.
Through Christ our Lord, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.*

Amen.

