

Forgiving the Church

A Reflection on Loving a Fallible Church

Reflections Family, Discipleship and the Christian Life 21 May 2020

There will be occasions, now and again, in our life within the Church, when we are wounded by it, and our temptation, at such times, is to reject it altogether. But when we reject the Church, it becomes very hard indeed to remain in touch with the living God, Jesus Christ. When we say, "I love You, Jesus, but I hate the Church," we end by losing not only the Church, but Jesus too. We find ourselves caught, as it were, between a rock and a hard place. We must press on, believing that Jesus, who could roll away a stone of any size — as at the Empty Tomb — can help us face this challenge, and "forgive" the Church.

The challenge is especially great, because the Church so seldom asks our forgiveness. Yet the Church, as an often fallible human congregation, stands in need of forgiveness, even as the Church, as the Body of the Living Christ, continues to offer us forgiveness. It is a paradox we must be prepared to accept, and to live with.

The Church, as the Body of the Living Christ, wears many faces. It prays and worships. It speaks words of instruction and healing; it cleanses us of our sins, our doubts, and our little faith; it invites us to the Table of the Lord; it binds us together in a covenant of love; it sends us out, and equips us, to minister; it anoints us when we are sick or dying; and it accompanies us in our search for meaning, and in our daily need of support. Not all these faces will come to us through those we look up to as our leaders. But when we live with the simple trust that Jesus comes to us within our Church, we shall find its ministry in places, and in faces, where we least expect it.

It is important, therefore, to think of the Church not as something "over there," but as a community of spiritually struggling, weak people, of whom we are part, and in whom we meet our Lord and Redeemer.

Amen.