

Dear Friends,

Not long ago at a confirmation retreat, a priest asked all the students to name their favorite part of the Mass. Of course one smart aleck said it was the closing hymn that was his favorite part. The other more serious answers included the readings, the homily, receiving Holy Communion and finally one serious young woman by the name of Mary said it was the Creed, the Profession of faith that was her favorite part. And when asked why, she said that years earlier her family had experienced a great tragedy. A tragedy that filled her dad and siblings with hate but it was her mom who changed everything. And she did it by reciting the creed everyday out loud in front of everyone. Before eating, as they all sat around the table, Mary's mom recited the creed. And she did this day after day to remind them, first, that God was there, He was there in their midst, second, He loved them, God loved them ecstatically, and finally and most importantly, if they believed in God, if they believed that he was there and that he loved them, then this belief had some serious implications for their lives. Our Gospel today began with the words, "The Apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith." What we didn't hear was the verse before it. It goes like this, "If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he wrongs you seven times in one day and returns to you seven times saying, 'I am sorry,' you should forgive him." It was after hearing this seemingly impossible command that the apostles ask for an increase in faith. They wanted more faith so that they could forgive as they were told to forgive. When Mary was a baby, her family lost everything they had. This happened because Mary's older brother, John, had been kidnapped. The leader of the gang that had kidnapped John demanded a large sum of money in return for John's life. Mary's family sold everything, the house, the car, anything of value was sold. And after they had given the man everything, all they received in return was a bag containing John's lifeless body. They'd been double-crossed. As you can imagine they were devastated. A couple of years later, unannounced, the gang leader showed up at their home, and he asked them to forgive him for what he had done. "I'm dying of an aggressive cancer," he told them, "and I want to be reconciled with you before I die." Mary's father wanted nothing to do with the man. Mary's brother refused to even acknowledge the man's request for forgiveness. Mary's sister spoke of her intense desire for the man to die a painful horrific death so that he would pay for what he'd done to John and to them. This kind of talk went on for days. Mary's mother, however, kept silent, carefully listening as her family uttered over and over, hateful-thing after hateful-thing, against the man who had been responsible for the murder of her beloved son. One night, while the family discussed again the man's request for what felt like the thousandth time, Mary's mother got up from the table and went into her bedroom. After a while, she came back into the dining room,

sat down, and with a broken yet firm voice, started reciting: I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord: who was conceived by the Holy spirit, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of Saints...At this point, Mary's mother made a long pause. And almost in a whisper, she continued: the forgiveness of sins...and then she repeated in a louder voice...I believe in the forgiveness of sins...and a third time, she shouted: I believe in the forgiveness of sins! After a long silence, with everyone staring at her, Mary's mother finally said: Forgive if you want to be reunited with our beloved John. Forgive if you want to take part in the resurrection of the body. Forgive if you want to enjoy life everlasting. And she repeated: Forgive if you want to be reunited with our beloved John. Forgive if you want to take part in the resurrection of the body. Forgive if you want to enjoy life everlasting. Every night sitting at the dinner table, in reciting the creed, a profession of faith, Mary's mom reminded her family that God was there in their midst, He loved them and then finally she was reminding them, if you believe in God then this belief has serious implications for your life. It was not easy, but with time, persistent prayer, and the repeated sacramental graces of Reconciliation and Eucharist they were able to forgive. And they found peace. The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith." Mary's family said to the Lord, "Increase our faith." We say to the Lord, "Increase our faith."

Let us be great Saints,

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