

Pencils, Books, and Dirty Looks! Yes, it's time for our future church leaders to go back to school! And it is also the time of year in which rain storms pass through more frequently and wet are children as they await the bus.

Going to elementary school in Va. Beach this time of year, a student embraces the drenching rains that track through during the tropical storms and hurricanes of August and September. I was remembering back to the sixth grade during one of those drenching rains. In my youth, I was known to be a little mischievous at times. All the kids from the housing complex where we lived were waiting for the school bus and it was raining, it was raining hard. Some the girls in my class were sharing an umbrella and laughing at us guys who were getting drenched. They were remarking how dry they were under the umbrella! After all, the reason why the guys didn't have an umbrella was that at time it was totally un-cool for a guy to carry an umbrella to school; after all, the "Fonz" was our coolness role model.



So, with lightning quick reflexes, I splashed a big rock into the mud puddle that they were huddled beside. They were splashed and they screamed and hurled some dirty looks at me! As soon as we arrived at school, I was given the privilege of meeting the principal. He gave me some valuable instructions and a two page writing assignment detailing the reasons why I shouldn't have chosen those actions! I was also instructed to ask these dirty-lookers for forgiveness!

Up to that time I think the brunt of my apologies had only been for my sisters who at times probably somewhat deserved my retaliation. After all, I was the youngest and outnumbered. But now, I was being asked to apologize to strangers. This apology I made to my classmates was not from my heart but more because I feared the consequences and remembered the paddle that lay visible on my principal's desk!

Over the years, my mischievousness has somewhat decreased and I am more concerned about my actions. There are times where I can see I have hurt someone or it has been pointed out to me. And likewise there are also times when I have been hurt and would welcome an apology! So what does it mean to forgive someone from the heart?

True forgiveness means that we restore the bond of love not forgetting the trespass but remembering that the image of God dwells within that person and just like us, they are imperfect. We must also seek out God in our confession and receive the cleansing of Holy Communion. We must search for forgiveness and mercy and make a sincere effort to change, because our eternity depends on it! *“From your hearts forgive his brother their trespasses.”* [Mt. 18:35]

St. Tikhon of Zadonsk writes: *Do we forgive our neighbors their trespasses? God also forgives us in His mercy. Do we refuse to forgive? God, too, will refuse to forgive us. As we treat our neighbors, so also does God treat us. The forgiveness, then, of your sins or unforgiveness, and hence also your salvation or destruction, depend on you yourself. For without forgiveness of sins there is no salvation. (Journey to Heaven)*

So even though I have left the elementary years of my formal education, I am still learning to become the kind of pupil my Father expects me to be. Please forgive me a sinner!