

'Is there an unforgivable sin?' by Fr Bede Home Retreat resource

In Greek, the word “fileo” means the love of friendship, tender but not all-encompassing ..instead the word “agapao” means love without reserve, total & unconditional. Jesus asks Peter the first time;

“Simon, do you love me?” [agapas-me] John 21.15
..with this total & unconditional love..

Prior to the experience of betrayal, the Apostle certainly would have said “I love you [agapo-me] unconditionally” ..now that he has known the bitter sadness of infidelity, the drama of his own weakness, he says with humility;

“Lord, you know that I love you [filo-se]” that
is

“I love you with my poor human love”

Christ insists,

“Simon, do you love me with this total love that I want?”

& Peter repeats the response of his humble human love,

“Kyrie, filo-se”..”Lord, I love you as I am able to love you”

The third time Jesus only says to Simon;

“Fileis-me?” ..”do you love me?”

Simon understands that his poor love is enough for Jesus, it is the only one of which he is capable; nonetheless he is grieved that the Lord spoke to him in this way. He thus replies;

“Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you [filo-se]”

This is to say that Jesus has put himself on the level of Peter, rather than Peter on Jesus’ level! It is exactly this divine conformity that gives hope to the disciple, who experienced the pain of infidelity.

From here is born the trust that makes him able to follow Christ to the end;

“this he said to show by what death he was to glorify God. After this he said to him;

“follow me” [John 21.19]

From the naïve enthusiasm of initial acceptance, passing through the sorrowful experience of denial & the weeping of conversion, Peter succeeded in trusting himself to that Jesus who adapts himself to his poor capacity to love. In this way, he shows us the way, notwithstanding all of our weaknesses.

We know that Jesus adapts himself to this weakness of ours.

[from “the Apostles” Pope Benedict XVI 2008]