

ST. ALOYSIUS NOVENA OF GRACE 2023

Eraser: Wipe Away My Offenses

Materials at hand : An eraser, either a rubber one— separate or attached to a pencil— or a chalkboard one, and a candle as a prayer focus.

CENTERING (Suggested opening prayer— or your own) : (Light the candle and say with your hands spread open:)

Loving God, Creator of all that is, here I am— today, in this place,
with all the senses You have given me. Help me to use them to come to experience You more deeply
You are present everywhere around me; open me to know more of the many ways
that Your goodness surrounds me. Thank you for this time to be with You and to listen to You.
Amen.

SAVORING (Senses at Work):

Take a look at the eraser before you, whether rubber for erasing pencil marks or a felt one for erasing chalk or a dry marker . Before touching it, try to predict what your fingers will experience.

As you touch the eraser, close your eyes so that you can be more aware of the information from your fingers. Notice the texture of the eraser; each kind has to have a certain amount of “give” in order to be able to do its job: rubbing off marks. Can you remember using an eraser with a pencil in school, knowing that when you made a mistake, whether in writing, spelling or arithmetic, it was there? You knew that if you made a mistake, you could make it right again, and the error would disappear as though it had never existed. Do you remember what kind of eraser you had and where you kept it?

Now imagine a piece of paper or a chalkboard on which has been written some of the mistakes that you have made in your life, some of the poor choices perhaps you wish you could go back and change . Recall for a moment what might be on such a list for you. Imagine also that you are God for a moment, taking the eraser before you and wiping away those mistakes, worries, even sins, so that they are gone, as though they had never existed. Notice how it feels to know that those mistakes are “off the record.” Is there a feeling of relief at not having to think about them or spend any energy regretting them any more?

It's certainly good to have erasers — in life, as well as in school!

LISTENING (The Word of God):

Listen to one or more of these passages as you watch the candle play across the eraser:

[Isa 25:8-9] Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

[1 John 1:8-9] If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

[Luke 23:33-34] When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."

CONSIDERING (Time to Reflect):

In a sense, erasers are the reason for our name for rubber. The early European explorers to Central and South America found the natives there playing with and using a substance that they called *cahuchu*, which means weeping wood. But in 1770 the English chemist Joseph Priestly discovered that the material could be used to rub out pencil marks, and so the English word for this substance became “rubber.”

That substance wasn’t known in ancient Israel, but the reality of “rubbing out” or forgiving sins was. God was the one who could forgive sins and mistakes and no longer hold it against the people, and when Jesus claimed to forgive sins, his Jewish audience heard that as his claiming to be God, which was hard for them to accept and eventually resulted in Jesus’ being crucified—after he forgave those directly responsible for his death from the cross.

Forgiveness and reconciliation is something we often do very poorly— whether it’s forgiving those who hurt us personally or our political or social enemies or even ourselves. Some ethnic groups may have longer memories than others; the definition of Irish Alzheimer’s, for example, is forgetting everything but the grudges!

There *is* a certain amount of friction and rubbing necessary in order to erase something; maybe part of the problem with reconciliation for us is that we resist the “friction” of change, and that keeps us from forgiving ourselves and others more readily.

RESPONDING (So what?):

The implications for our lives of God’s forgiving love are fairly clear, although we don’t usually want to hear them. First of all, we need to forgive ourselves, since God has forgiven us, which can at times be the hardest of all. But that’s just the beginning.

The book of Sirach puts it this way: “Forgive your neighbor the wrong he has done, and then your sins will be pardoned when you pray. Does anyone harbor anger against another, and expect healing from the Lord? If one has no mercy toward another like himself, can he then seek pardon for his own sins?” [Sira 28:2-4] Paul’s letter to the Christians at Colossus puts it quite succinctly: “... just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.” [Col. 3:13] And the gospel of Matthew gives us a choice: “... if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” [Mat 6:14-15]

We hear it again and again in scripture: the implications of God’s merciful, forgiving, “erasing” love are that we are to work at the same kind of love for each other, a love that may not like some of our dumb choices but keeps on loving us, no matter what we choose.

Peter, perhaps like some of us, wanted to know the outer limits of that forgiving love that we are called to. “Then Peter came and said to him, “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.” [Mat 18:21-22] In other words, Jesus is reminding us that God’s forgiveness is endless towards us, and that is our goal with others, too.

Loving God of all our choices and errors, of erasers and forgiveness, thank You for all my mistakes; help me to learn from each one and learn to love You and to love *like* You each time I fall short of what I want to do. Please bless all those whom I need to forgive and those who need to forgive me. Bless, too, all those who make and use erasers of all kinds, especially teachers and students. Help me to remember Your forgiving love whenever I see an eraser. Amen.

Taken from *Savoring God: Praying With All Our Senses* by Kathleen Finley (2003)9