

FORGIVENESS

What On Earth Is It?



*“When you forgive, you don’t change the past,
you change the future.”*

Bernard Meltzer

by Juliann Stella Tuck

One of my mother, Rita Farr's,
favorite quotes that she wrote out and
put on her refrigerator:

*“In every home where love abides
and friendship is a guest
is surely home and home-sweet-home
for there the heart can rest.”*

(Henry Van Dyke)

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**Any emphasis within biblical quotes made at the discretion of the author.*

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*When breaks the day, and dawn grows bright,
Christ nearer seems, the Light of Light:
From us, like shades that nighttime brings,
Drive forth, O Lord, all darksome things.*

“When Breaks the Day”
by Rebecca Hincke

“If today you hear His voice, harden not your heart.”

Hebrews 3:15

St. Maria Goretti was only 11 years-old when she was assaulted by 20 year-old Alessandro Serenelli whose advances were turned away by Maria several times. Alessandro had a very rough life with his mother dying in a mental asylum when he was a baby and his father an alcoholic. On July 5, 1902, Alessandro shoved Maria into a bedroom and demanded she give in to him. Maria told him that it would be a sin. In a rage, Alessandro stabbed her 14 times in her heart, lungs and intestines. He ran away into his bedroom and pretended to be asleep. Discovered, Maria ultimately lived for 20 hours after the stabbing, undergoing surgery with no anesthesia. Before she died on July 6, Maria forgave Alessandro. She said: “Yes, for the love of Jesus, I forgive him...and I want him to be with me in Paradise.”

An unrepentant Alessandro was in his 11th year of a 30 year prison term when he had a vision of Maria. In the vision, Maria gave him 14 white lilies, one for each of the times he had stabbed her. As he accepted them, each lily turned into a still white flame. This vision converted Alessandro.

He was released from prison after 27 years and immediately sought out Maria’s mother to beg her for forgiveness. Her mother, Asunta, forgave Alessandro and accepted him as a member of her family. Alessandro went on to live in a Capuchin monastery as a lay brother laborer for the rest of his life. He died at age 87. Maria Goretti was declared a Saint on June 24, 1950 with Alessandro, her mother and four of her siblings present in St. Peter’s Square at the first open air Canonization in history.

How could Maria, who had just been painfully attacked and mortally wounded by Alessandro, forgive him on her deathbed? How could her poor mother, who saw her child so gravely injured and then die ever forgive him? Maria was the third of seven children who was tasked with watching her younger siblings while her mother, a widow since Maria was 9, worked in the fields as a tenant farmer with her older siblings. Her loss must have been extremely difficult on her mother who already had life very hard.

What exactly is forgiveness? How is such amazing forgiveness even possible? As we boost our true understanding of forgiveness, let’s begin with the definition of the word.

Forgiveness: *Pardon or remission of an offense. Also, “the action or process of forgiving or being forgiven.”*

*In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, He spoke to us **through the Son...***

(Hebrews: 1:1-6)

During the Transfiguration of Our Lord, God the Father’s voice was audibly heard booming from heaven saying: **“This is my chosen Son; listen to Him”** (Luke 9:35) God the Father’s voice was also heard at the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan saying: **“This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”** (2 Peter 1:17) God the Father said that we should **“listen to Him.”**

Regarding the prophetic messages taught to the apostles by Jesus, St. Peter said: **“You will do well to be attentive to it.”** (2 Peter 1:19)

As God has now spoken to us “through the Son”, what did Jesus say about forgiveness? The only official prayer that Jesus, personally, taught us to pray is the “Our Father” prayer. This prayer, taught to us by God Almighty Himself, the Second Person of the Most Blessed Trinity, contains these words: **“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”** Jesus taught us so many things while He was on this earth. He simplified those teachings into this one prayer. It shows us how crucially important forgiveness is to God. This prayer is prayed at every Holy Mass and has been repeated by the faithful since Jesus walked the earth. No matter how hard this can be sometimes, God has taught us that His grace of forgiveness will be with those who forgive, and His grace of forgiveness will not be with those who do not.

The word **Forgive** is in the bible 72 times. The word **Forgiven** is in the bible 46 times. The word **Forgiveness** is in the bible 22 times. Along with the biblical stories of the lost sheep, (Matthew 18:10-14) the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) and the lost coin, (Luke 15:8-10) let’s look at more statements from Jesus on forgiving:

“When you stand to pray, forgive anyone against whom you have a grievance, so that your heavenly Father may, in turn, forgive you your transgressions.”
(Mark 11:25)

In John 8:11 we find these words of Jesus: **“Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more.”** Jesus was addressing a woman who was caught in adultery. At that time, adultery was considered a sin punishable by death! It was so horribly

offensive, that the people caught in this behavior were painfully stoned to death. After forgiving the doomed woman's sin, He turns to the stone wielding crowd and says: "He who is without sin, cast the first stone." (John 8:7)

So, not only are we to forgive other people's sins, we need to examine our own consciences. We tend to take our sins much more lightly than other people's sins, but God does not. It is interesting that in verse 9, the elders examined their consciences first and walked away. Obviously, they had lived longer and had time to commit more sins, but also they had lived long enough to understand the importance of forgiveness and the cancerous hurt that grows and spreads from unforgiveness.

"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." (Luke 17:3)

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you: Love your enemies and pray for those that persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father.'" (Matthew 5:43)

"Then Peter approaching asked Him, 'Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him? As many as seven times? Jesus answered, 'I say to you not seven times but seventy-seven times. That is why the kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king who decided to settle accounts with his servants. When he began the accounting, a debtor was brought before him who owed him a huge amount. Since he had no way of paying it back, his master ordered him to be sold, along with his wife, his children, and all his property, in payment of the debt. At that, the servant fell down, did him homage, and said, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back in full.'

Moved with compassion, the master of that servant let him go and forgave him the loan. When that servant had left, he found one of his servants who owed him a much smaller amount. He seized him and started to choke him, demanding, 'Pay back what you owe.' Falling to his knees, his fellow servant begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' But, he refused. Instead, he had him put in prison until he paid back the debt. Now when his fellow servants saw what had happened, they were deeply disturbed, and went to their master and reported the whole affair. His master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you your entire debt because you begged me to. Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant, as I had pity on you?'

Then, in anger, his master handed him over to the jailers until he should pay back the whole debt. So will my Father do to you, unless each of you forgives his brother from his heart.” (Matthew 18:21-34)

“The Pharisees and their scribes complained to His disciples, saying, ‘Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?’ Jesus said to them in reply: ‘Those who are healthy do not need a physician, but the sick do. I have not come to call the righteous to repentance but sinners.’” (Luke 5:30-32)

Jesus said to His disciples: “Be merciful as your Father is merciful. Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will, in return, be measured out to you.” (Luke 6:36-38)

This is such a critical teaching from our Lord. It is crystal clear that if we want our sins to be forgiven by God, then we must forgive others who have sinned against us. We must take this seriously and apply it to our lives, with His grace. He didn’t provide any clarifications as to serious offenses versus minor offenses. “Love is stronger than sin.” (CCC 2844) Every person is made in His image and likeness and is infinitely unconditionally loved.

“It is in pardoning that we are pardoned.”
(St. Francis of Assisi)

May God grant us the humility each and every day to recognize our own sins and to forgive others. May we recognize the importance of walking each day with the Lord Jesus, uniting our sufferings to His, while building our armor of love in order to ward off the unrelenting attacks of the devil. May we always be aware of the fruit of our actions, even when we somehow thought our intentions were good, and humbly repent and seek forgiveness when we have fallen. Amen.

Catechism of the Catholic Church

2844: Christian prayer extends to the forgiveness of enemies, transfiguring the disciple by configuring him to his Master. Forgiveness is a high-point of Christian prayer; only hearts attuned to God's compassion can receive the gift of prayer. Forgiveness also bears witness that, in our world, love is stronger than sin. The martyrs of yesterday and today bear this witness to Jesus. Forgiveness is the fundamental condition of the reconciliation of the children of God with their Father and of men with one another.

2845: There is no limit or measure to this essentially divine forgiveness, whether one speaks of “sins” as in Luke 11:4, or “debts” as in Matthew 6:1. We are always debtors: “Owe no one anything, except to love one another.” (Romans 13:8) The communion of the Holy Trinity is the source and criterion of truth in every relationship. It is lived out in prayer, above all in the Eucharist.

“God does not accept the sacrifice of a sower of disunion, but commands that he depart from the altar so that he may first be reconciled with his brother. For God can be appeased only by prayers that make peace. To God, the better offering is peace, brotherly concord, and a people made one in the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”

(St. Cyprian, De Dom. orat 23; cf Mt 5:24)

Stories of Forgiveness

Now a canonized Saint, Pope John Paul II was shot in St. Peter's Square on May 13, 1981 by would be assassin, 23 year-old Mahmet Ali Agca. A bullet hit him in the abdomen, left hand and right arm. He was rushed to the hospital for emergency surgery. The Holy Father was shot on the Feast of Our Lady of Fatima. He credited Our Lady of Fatima's motherly protection for saving his life. "One hand pulled the trigger, another guided the bullet."

Pope John Paul II quickly forgave his attempted assassin, and when he was able after surgery, he asked the faithful to pray for Mahmet. In 1983, he visited Mahmet (who was given a life sentence) in jail. He prayed with Mahmet, and he offered Mahmet his forgiveness in person. (Images of this amazing, historical moment of forgiveness can be found with an internet search.) He asked for Mahmet to be pardoned, and this request was honored in 2000. Mahmet was then sent back to his home country of Turkey where he converted to Christianity and served his prison sentence for a past crime until his release in 2010.

In 2014, Mahmet returned to Rome and placed two dozen white roses on the tomb of St. John Paul II.

"The act of forgiveness is a powerful tool in life that many of us have yet to master."

(Jerry Finzi)

Fr. Ubald Rugirangoga (1955-2021)

Fr. Ubald was a Catholic priest in the Cyangugu diocese of southeastern Rwanda for more than thirty-five years. Fr. Ubald grew up under the shadow of tribal tensions. He was the eldest of four children. When Ubald was only seven, his father, uncle, and several other family members were murdered because of their Tutsi ethnicity. This horror extinguished much of the joy that so characterized his family's life. Raised in the faith by his widowed mother, Ubald felt called to become a priest to preach love. He wanted to follow the example of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, and lead people in the faith. His journey to becoming a priest was filled with obstacles, setbacks, doubts, and even ethnic raids in the seminary. Persevering through them all, Fr. Ubald was ordained a priest in 1984.

During the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, he lost more than eighty members of his family, including his mother, and more than 45,000 Tutsis of all faiths that took refuge at his parish from the Hutus. Such unimaginable horror! Many of the Hutus had lived and worshiped among those they brutally murdered. During a trip to Lourdes, France, after this unbelievable atrocity happened, Fr. Ubald heard Jesus tell him to **“pick up his cross”**: the genocide. At that moment, Fr. Ubald felt a release from the burden of his sorrows and knew he was called to preach healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

He began a ministry called “The Center for the Secret of Peace” in Rwanda, Central Africa. So sadly, he passed away in 2021 in the United States after contracting the Covid virus. He taught us that: **“forgiveness makes you free.”** We have to **“choose to forgive.”** The people from opposing villages forgave those that brutally massacred their family members in the genocide. They began to heal and live in peace with each other. It is very difficult to imagine such acts of forgiveness. Father taught this can only happen with God’s help, and when anger, even righteous anger, and hate are replaced with love. He said that: **“Extreme horror requires extreme forgiveness.”** I met Fr. Ubald, and he exuded holiness. Read more about his life, watch the documentary on his life, including how he survived the genocide, and learn more about the Center at [“secretofpeace.org.”](http://secretofpeace.org)

Father Ubald taught us the most difficult lesson fallen humanity can learn. Forgiving those who have offended us, even in the most unspeakable ways, can help us in our own salvation as well as in helping others navigate their way to heaven. Father was told by God to “carry his cross.” God can turn all things into good. The devil does not ever have to be the victor, even seemingly so. We can never turn back time, but when we strap the cross on our back as our Savior had put onto his, we can unite our sufferings to His for the sake of our salvation and others.

Father Larry Richards on St. Margaret Mary Alacoque to whom Jesus gave the teaching on His Most Sacred Heart:

“Jesus said to Mary, I want you to go to the Bishop, and tell him I want you to have devotion to My Sacred Heart established. She went to the Bishop, and the Bishop thought she was a nutcase. The Bishop said to her: ‘If Jesus Christ is really appearing to you, ask Him what I confessed the last time I went to confession.’ So, when Jesus appeared to her again, she said: ‘Jesus’ and He said: ‘I know what he wants. Go back and tell him I have forgotten.’ When you go to confession, confess your sins, and put them at the feet of Jesus, He pays the penalty. That is the justice of God. He takes on your sin and fulfills the justice of God.”

To forgive does not mean that the ramifications of the offender's actions are not real or that they must not be atoned for before God by the offender. The hurt that the offender caused is real, and the lasting effects are real. They must seek God's forgiveness and do penance for their actions. *"For He scourges and then has mercy; He casts down to the depths of the nether world, and he brings up from the great abyss. No one can escape His Hand."* (Tobit 13:2)

I normally don't quote Hollywood actors in my papers, but this one is spot on:

"I've had some challenges in the past couple of years, and ultimately, I believe that suffering leads to salvation. We have to somehow accept and not deny, but feel our suffering. And then, we have to make one of two decisions, we either decide to go through the gate of resentment, which leads to vengeance, which leads to self-harm, which leads to harm to others, or we go through the gate of forgiveness, which leads to grace. Just as Jesus did on the cross. He suffered terribly, and He was broken by it. To look upon the people who were causing that suffering, or the situation that was causing that suffering with compassion and with forgiveness, that is what opens the gates of heaven for all of us."

(Jim Carrey, Actor)

Forgiveness Can be Hard; We Need God's Help

Forgiveness, as people learn at a very young age, can be very difficult for us to do. Our weak fallen nature makes forgiving hard. We have been hurt or offended in some way by another person. We have been let down by that person.

“I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Ephesians 4:1-3)

We need God's grace to understand that sin is a product of the enemy of God. A person who has sinned against us has fallen prey to the sinful temptations of the devil. We tend to think that the offender is a much worse person than we are, which can be true or not true. It is really hard to admit that we are *all* fallen people; some people have fallen (or offended) in greater ways than others.

By the grace of God, maybe we, personally, have not fallen into such sinful actions, but we must remember that: *“There, but for the grace of God, go I.”* (John Bradford)

*“If you are suffering from a bad man's injustice, forgive him,
lest there be two bad men.”*
(St. Augustine)

God has taught us that all people are His children; they are all created in His image and likeness; they are all created good. Since when one of His children sins, to whatever degree, it is because of the enemy's influence, we need to think with the mind of God, and wish with good will for that person's repentance and reunification with God. *“I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked man, says the Lord, but rather in his conversion, that he may live.”* (Ezekiel 33:11) No matter what offense the person has committed, that person is still a child of God that is loved every bit as much as we are by Him.

“What our senses fail to fathom, let us grasp through faith's consent.”
(St. Thomas Aquinas)

Unforgiveness then, is certainly not of God. It is absolutely not what Jesus taught us. He only taught us what was for our good. He left us His Church and the Holy Sacraments to help us do what we cannot do on our own, with the graces we can receive.

“Forgiveness is above all a personal choice, a decision of the heart to go against the natural instinct to pay back evil with evil.” (St. John Paul II)

Forgiveness is not something that we can do alone. Left to ourselves, our hearts would steadily grow harder and harder. We need God’s grace to soften our hearts and to forgive.

“To err is human, to forgive, divine.” (Alexander Pope)

Jesus, as He hung on the cross, said: **“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”** (Luke 23-34) For the vast majority of sinners, their sinful acts are done in ignorance. If they knew the gravity and repercussions of their sinful action, if they knew of the evil one and his cohorts who have inspired this action, and if they knew the offense they have committed against a loving God, it is highly unlikely they would have offended thusly. Jesus knew this of His torturers and murderers. This is why He spoke those merciful words.

“The saints rejoiced at injuries and persecutions, because in forgiving them they had something to present to God when they prayed to Him.”
(St. Teresa of Avila)

Pope Benedict XVI: General Audience, Wednesday, February 15, 2012:

“The first prayer that Jesus addresses to the Father is a prayer of intercession; He asks for forgiveness for His executioners. By so doing, Jesus is doing in person what He had taught in the Sermon on the Mount when He said: **‘I say to you that hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.’** (Lk 6:27); and He had also promised to those who are able to forgive: **‘your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High.’** (v. 35) Now, from the Cross, He not only pardons His executioners, but He addresses the Father directly, interceding for them.

Jesus’ attitude finds a moving ‘imitation’ in the account of the stoning of St. Stephen, the first martyr. Indeed Stephen, now nearing his end, ‘knelt down and cried with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’ And when he had said this, he fell asleep.’ (Acts 7:60); these were his last words.

The comparison between Jesus' prayer for forgiveness and that of the protomartyr is significant. St. Stephen turns to the Risen Lord and requests that his killing — an action described clearly by the words 'his sin' — not be held against those who stoned him.

Jesus on the Cross addresses the Father and not only asks forgiveness for those who crucify Him, but also offers an interpretation of what is happening. According to what He says, in fact, the men who are crucifying Him **'know not what they do.'** (Lk 23:34) He therefore postulates ignorance, 'not knowing', as a reason for His request for the Father's forgiveness, because it leaves the door open to conversion, as, moreover, happens in the words that the centurion was to speak at Jesus' death: 'Certainly this Man was innocent, (v. 47) He was the Son of God.' It remains a source of comfort for all times and for all people that both in the case of those who genuinely did not know (His executioners) and in the case of those who did know, (the people who condemned Him) the Lord makes ignorance the motive for His plea for forgiveness: He sees it as a door that can open us to conversion." (Jesus of Nazareth, II, [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011, p. 208]

"He who knows how to forgive prepares many graces from God. As often as I look upon the cross, so often will I forgive with all my heart."
(St. Faustina)

Pope Leo XIV - 2025:

"While never denying that evil exists or acting as if bad things do not happen in this world, the example of Jesus shows us that true forgiveness does not wait for contrition, but is offered first as a gift. When we experience wounds and betrayal, let us ask for the grace to offer true forgiveness even when we feel misunderstood and abandoned or when it seems to be in vain. In this way, may we know the freedom and peace that comes from a loving and forgiving heart."

What if They Are Not Sorry?

What if our offender is not sorry? What if they do not ask for our forgiveness, and they continue to obstinately stand firm in their sins? We must forgive them anyway. God will be their judge; He will take care of them. In the meantime, we pray for their conversion and repentance. We cannot control their actions, only our own. It took St. Maria Goretti's murderer 11 years and a miracle to repent!

“The saints have no hatred, no bitterness; they forgive everything and think they deserve much for their offenses against God.” (St. John Vianney)

What if those we offended will not allow us to apologize? Ultimately, if people will not allow those who offended them to apologize, they will have to answer to God for this. It becomes between them and God. We must continue to make reparation for our sins/offenses, and let God do the rest.

Apologizing for our sinful failures and forgiving those who have offended us is truly the mysterious answer to joy and meaning in life. It is the way to gain power over evil and to find meaning in suffering, most especially the deepest harm and suffering caused to us by others. It is one of the most critical lessons to learn in life. So very much time, and the possibility of aiding in the salvation of others, is wasted on unforgiveness and avoidance of addressing forgiveness. Extra graces are absolutely available from God for forgiveness and peace within families, **where unconditional love resides.**

God knows all and sees all. He knows how hard it can be. God is waiting to pour out His graces on those who forgive. I believe we will all have to answer to God if we waste opportunities for the sanctification of ourselves and others.

“Never miss the opportunity to take advantage spiritually of your suffering. What does this mean? It is a mystery, but somehow in the Christian dispensation, because we are all members together of the great Mystical Body of Christ, somehow our suffering, offered to Christ, can alleviate the suffering of someone else. Don't ask me precisely how that works, I don't really know how it works, but it is witnessed to by all of the great saints. Somehow, I can take my suffering and say, Lord, take my suffering and use it to alleviate the pain, suffering, sorrow and anguish of someone else. Don't miss the opportunity of your own suffering to offer it to Christ for the benefit of the Mystical Body.” (Bishop Robert Barron)

The Devil's Influence; Forgive and Don't Look Back

Living a totally secular life in this world will never teach you these crucial lessons. The devil certainly does not want us to learn about forgiveness, mercy or sacrificial suffering. He enjoys discord, misery, anger, disgust and hate that continue to grow in relationships and in the world through unforgiveness. The trickle down effect of the pain it can continue to cause is real. Our Lord Jesus prayed to the Father: **“I gave them your word, and the world hated them, because they do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world.”** (John 17:14) Being a Christian sets us apart; Christianity truly lived is not understood by the secular world. Christians are called to holiness and to become saints. To attain holiness with God's help, we must forgive. The fruit of forgiveness is peace, the result that all people will see.

Speaking of the devil, Msgr. Steven Rossetti, an exorcist, teaches of the 7 ways that we can make satan and his cohorts stronger and more powerful:

1. Relapsing into sinful behavior and unholy relationships
2. Fear of satan and the demons
3. Anger, wrath and rage
4. Unforgiveness
5. Believing false spiritual experiences and spiritual pride
6. Frequenting shamans and other pagan healers
7. Divination of all sorts (ex. Ouija boards, tarot cards, magic, numerology)

Each of these things can make the state of souls worse and worse. In order to combat and defeat the devil, we need to “feed” our souls with these 7 things:

1. Regular reception of the Sacraments (frequent Holy Communion and Confession)
2. Daily meditation on the Word of God
3. Eucharistic adoration and holy hours
4. Daily Holy Rosary and other Marian prayers
5. Fasting and almsgiving
6. Open the heart to acts of love to God; practice virtues (forgiveness, etc.)
7. Deliverance prayers as needed (ex. Auxilium Christianorum prayers)

“You shall not bear hatred for your brother in your heart. Though you may have to reprove him, do not incur sin because of him. Take no revenge and cherish no grudge against your fellow countrymen. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.” (Leviticus 19:7-18)

In the biblical story of Lot, (Genesis 19:1-38) God tells Lot and his family not to look back at sin-filled Sodom as they leave the town. Lot’s wife disobeys this directive and is immediately turned into a pillar of salt. A message here from God is not to look back and dwell on our personal sins or the sins of others because doing so will deprive us of God’s life within us.

“No one heals himself by wounding another.”

(St. Ambrose)

Anger and Virtue

Anger can be a righteous feeling, but we must be cautious. Anger can stay deep within us for years and years. However, we need to address our anger and overcome it with God's grace and the development of virtue.

“It is better not to allow anger, however just and reasonable, to enter at all, than to admit it in ever so slight a degree; once admitted, it will not be easily expelled, for, though at first just a small plant, it will immediately grow into a large tree.” (St. Augustine)

“The memory of insults is the residue of anger. It keeps sins alive, hates justice, ruins virtue, poisons the heart, rots the mind, defeats concentration, paralyzes prayer, puts love at a distance, and is a nail driven into the soul. In order to appease the anger, love is necessary.” (St. John Climacus)

Sadly, anger that is allowed to fester or grow can turn into wrath and even into rage. Again, this is the devil's playing field. We must grow in the virtues needed to dismiss any thoughts or desires contrary to God's will. Forbearance/patience is a virtue needed to overcome the deadly sin of wrath. Anger allowed to turn into wrath can decrease our ability to realize we are acting irrationally. *“Anger that becomes wrath does nothing to re-establish justice. Wrath alienates us from God, neighbor, creation and ourselves.”* (Doug Culp, Catholic Diocese of Lexington)

Another virtue to seek is Meekness. Meekness reflects gentleness, patience, mildness, kindness, humility and self-control. Jesus Christ is the perfect example of this virtue. He lived it. If we desire to live the virtues in our lives, if we desire holiness and to live in the love of Christ, we will choose to act accordingly when faced with instances where we can become angry, etc. We call out to God for His help. This does not mean we are wimpy and weak; we have self-control guided by God, and the good result will be seen in our lives.

We humans tend to add up instances of infraction upon infraction. When we are personally hurt, it is hard to forget. If someone wrongs us more than once, our mind instinctively goes back to the previous time we were wronged by this person. Even if we feel we have previously forgiven them, the temptation is to then add the new infraction upon the old, and this can continue to add on, one hurt upon the other, for years, especially in marriages and families. When we have been hurt, it is definitely easier to forgive than to forget, especially when the same person offends us again.

Maybe our anger is tied up with grief? This is something to ponder. Our hearts grieve when we have been disappointed by someone we love, especially one whom we once looked up to. *“I sat with my anger long enough until she told me her name was grief.”* (C.S. Lewis)

It is a fact that when we begin to think the worst of another, we can actually begin to be tempted by satan and his cohorts to believe bad things about them that are not even true at all! The demons are so very adept at this! Modern day texting on phones is surely their domain. A person’s tone and attitude can be completely misunderstood because they are not heard. Words can be completely misconstrued, especially when a conflict is happening between people. I think most people have experienced this. In person discussions are a must to dispel the work of the devil.

We can also forget to examine ourselves to see if our actions influenced the hurtful actions of the other. Did something we said cause their anger? Was it our tone of voice, etc.? Many times these actions can involve hurtful words that cut deep, instead of a physical infraction. How can marriages and relationships possibly stay together when this happens? Wouldn’t anger and resentment soon replace love? Sadly, it does in many marriages, and the result is divorce and broken families. God knows all of our human weaknesses, and He has provided us with the remedy. God has never said that this life would be easy. Selfless virtues lived with the love of God equals successful marriages and fruitful relationships.

Resentment is defined as: *“Bitter indignation at having been treated unfairly.”* In order to overcome resentment, one must give this emotion over to God, seek to forgive, be thankful to God for all of one’s blessings, and seek to do good for others. Resentment is so negative because it feeds the demons, results in feelings of deep sadness and hopelessness, and keeps us from showing mercy to ourselves and others.

“Resentment is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die.”

(St. Augustine)

St. Lucia, one of the three visionaries of Our Lady of Fatima, and the only one to live until old age, said that Mary told her the last battle of satan would be waged against marriage and the family. We are seeing this in our day and age. We must fight and not let him win this battle!

Prayer for healing of inner anger:

“In the Holy Name of Jesus, I renounce, I rebuke, I reject the evil spirits of anger, wrath and rage. I reject them, I rebuke them, I renounce them, and I cast them out in Jesus’ name. Amen.” (Msgr Stephen Rosetti, Exorcist)

“If we do not fill our mind with prayer, it will fill itself with anxieties, worries, temptations, resentments, and unwelcome memories.”

(Dr. Scott Hahn)

Pope Benedict XVI and More Biblical Passages

Pope Benedict XVI, Angelus, Sunday, January 1, 2006:

“When man allows himself to be enlightened by the splendour of truth, he inwardly becomes a courageous peacemaker. We learn a great lesson from this liturgical season that we are living: to welcome the gift of peace, we must open ourselves to the truth that is revealed in the person of Jesus, who taught us the “content” and “method” of peace, that is, love.

Indeed, God, who is perfect and subsisting Love, has revealed Himself in Jesus, embracing our human condition. In this way, He has also pointed out to us the way of peace: dialogue, forgiveness, solidarity. This is the only path that leads to true peace.”

The apostles and disciples taught us this lesson in many different entries in the Sacred Scriptures:

Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another, as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these put on love, that is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were called into one body. (Colossians 3:12-15)

“Be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ.” (Ephesians 4:32)

“Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.” (1 Peter 4: 12-13)

“...and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” (Romans 8:17-18)

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20)

Why is it that some people have life so hard while others do not? Does it mean that God is punishing those people more than others? I will conjecture to you that while God does not cause their suffering, He will use their suffering to do tremendous good. Those who suffer much are given the mysterious gift of sharing in the suffering of Jesus Christ. No person has ever, or will ever, suffer as Jesus suffered. Those who suffer, especially at the hands of another person, are called to great love. God will give these people the grace of truly understanding Jesus' unconditional love for us. With this merciful gift, people reach higher heights and depths of love; they will better understand the level of divine love that God has for them and all humanity. Many will live and die not being given this tremendous gift from God. This gift enables true love and empathy for others, and it brings people ever closer to the heart of God.

Listen closely to this explanation of 1 Colossians 1:24 in which St. Paul writes, *"Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of His body, that is, the church."* This does not mean Christ's sufferings and death were not complete for our salvation. It means that we can unite our sufferings to His for the application of the merits of His sufferings for individual souls. St. Augustine taught that Christ's Passion is continued in the members of His mystical body as they unite their sufferings to Jesus, the Head.

What a beautiful teaching this is! It helps us make sense of our sufferings and also find meaning in the reality that our sufferings could aid us in our salvation as well as aiding in the salvation of those we offer them up for.

Praise be God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all consolation! He comforts us in all our afflictions and thus enables us to comfort those who are in trouble, with the same consolation we have received from Him. As we have shared much in the sufferings of Christ, so through Christ do we share abundantly in His consolation." (2 Corinthians 1:3-5)

"There are many kinds of alms, the giving of which helps us obtain pardon for our sins; but none is greater than that by which we forgive from our heart a sin that has been committed against us."

(St. Augustine)

More Perspective on Forgiveness

Pope Francis had several quotes that are spot on. In his message for the World Day of Peace on January 1, 2025, he said he was thinking “especially of those who feel downtrodden, burdened by their past mistakes, oppressed by the judgment of others and are incapable of perceiving even a glimmer of hope for their own lives.” Sadly, there is a thing in our day called the “cancel culture” where people want to stand in unforgiveness for others while totally ignoring or pridefully minimizing their own sinfulness. God teaches us to examine ourselves closely: **“Why do you notice the splinter in your brother’s eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own?”** (Luke 6:41) We are all sinners. Pope Francis wished sinners his “heartfelt good wishes of peace.”

Pope Francis went on to say: “In order to forgive others their trespasses and to offer them hope, we need for our own lives to be filled with that same hope, the fruit of our experience of God’s mercy. Hope overflows and aims at one generosity; it is free of calculation, makes no hidden demands, is unconcerned with gain, but one thing alone; to raise up those who have fallen, to heal hearts that are broken and to set us free from every kind of bondage.”

He hit the nail on the head with that last line. Pope Francis also said to: “Not torment penitents.” In his craftiness, Satan wants us to stand in unforgiveness and resentment for our offenders. On a purely human level, this is understandable because we have been hurt. But, in so doing, we hold ourselves bound as victims, we hold the offender bound, and we hold bound other family members or friends that may be affected. The hurt continues and grows. There is a continual trickle down effect as we are all God’s children, and He created us to live in community. The devil and his cohorts thrive when the suffering caused by a person’s temptation to sin continues, unabatedly, to negatively affect people when we stand in unforgiveness and resentment.

The devil wants us to remain a prisoner to the past. The feeling of not being forgiven or the action of standing in unforgiveness can deeply affect people’s mental, emotional, physical and spiritual health. It can lead to many bad things including depression, drug or alcohol addiction, or even suicide. It is contrary to how God made us. It is too much for any soul to bear. It is a lead weight daily dragging a person down.

“Don’t play the victim, even though you can legitimately play the victim card...the mindset of a victim is parasitic to your soul.”

(Charlie Kirk)

Another way to look at it from exorcist priest, Father Chad Ripperger:

“Christ said ‘forgive seven times seventy times.’ The reason you have to forgive every single time is because you need to do that for yourself, let alone for the other individual. You need to do that for yourself. If you are really going to love people for charity, you have to be willing to let loose of what they have done to you in the past to seek out what’s truly good. One of the things that I have learned being an exorcist is that you don’t want to see people in hell, even your worst enemies. Part of it is the beauty of people’s transformation before they get to heaven. You would actually want for this person to go through a transformation, so that you can be friends with them in heaven.”

As children of God, we are called to love all people as God does. Forgiving does NOT mean that we have to “like” all people all of the time. We can wish all good for the soul of someone who has wronged us, and at the same time not want to “hang out” with them. To forgive people is like relinquishing our right to take vengeance against them, instead turning them over to the Lord. God says: *“Have regard for good things in the sight of all men..vengeance is Mine, I will repay.”* (Romans 12:17-19) Ultimately, when we try to take vengeance, we make things worse and worse for everyone.

The interesting part here is that full forgiveness, in God’s eyes, requires not only forgiveness, but reconciliation. Reconciliation is impossible if the offending person does not express regret or seek forgiveness. However, if the offending person is sorry, **God, as usual, calls us to something greater!** *“Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother.”* (Matthew 5:25)

Forgiveness does not mean we will automatically forget. Your forgiveness is telling the offender that you will not continue to hold their offense against them. You will move your relationship into a new chapter, opening the floodgates of God’s grace when we forgive. We can pray for God to help us and not give the devil the satisfaction of tormenting us any longer.

Both people must lovingly cooperate to leave the offense(s) behind them and start over. This takes great humility, and must be embarked on through prayer. Again, Jesus is the living example to us of the miraculous grace that can be found through true forgiveness.

“To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you.”

(Louis B. Smedes)

“Holding a grudge is like drinking poison, it doesn’t make you strong; it makes you bitter. Forgiving doesn’t make you weak; it sets you free.”

(Author unknown)

Personalities can clash on this side of heaven, and that is the truth. Loving is a choice, an unconditional action on our part toward another. Simply liking someone involves “feelings” which are ever changing. In a recorded vision, Jesus said: “I place no store in how you feel, it is your will that moves My Heart.” We must soundly direct our will to live and love as God has taught us to, being guided by truth, not by our feelings, and then we can have freedom and truly move mountains!

“Lord, make me a channel of your peace. Where there is hatred, I will bring love. Where there is wrong, I may bring the spirit of forgiveness. Where there is discord, I may bring harmony. Where there is error, that I may bring truth. Where there is doubt, I may bring faith. Where there is despair, that I may bring hope. Where there are shadows, that I may bring light. Where there is sadness, I may bring joy. Lord, grant that I may seek to comfort rather than to be comforted, to understand rather than to be understood, to love rather than to be loved. For it is by forgetting self that one finds, it is by forgiving that one is forgiven, and it is by dying that one awakens to eternal life. Amen.”
(Prayer of St. Francis as quoted by St. Mother Teresa)

“Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God.”

(Mt. 5:9)

The true peacemaker initiates reconciliation
when others have wronged them.

There is Hope for All People

Jesus taught us that there is always hope for people. In Mark 5:2-17, a man was possessed by many demons, so many that he said his name was, “Legion.” No one had any hope for this poor man, but Jesus drove the demons out of him. So, we must be open to God working through us in powerful ways to help seemingly irredeemable people. We must forgive, pray and be an instrument of mercy for those who have hurt us, truly asking God’s redeeming grace for them to transform their lives.

“The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit, who can bear?” (Proverbs 18:14)

“If anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure (not to exaggerate) to all of you. This punishment by the majority is enough, so that on the contrary you should forgive and encourage him instead, or else the person may be overwhelmed by excessive pain. I urge you to reaffirm your love for him.” (2 Corinthians 2:5-8)

Lutheran Pastor, Richard Wurmbrand, wrote an account of the things he witnessed as a prisoner in Communist Romania. This is his extraordinary and moving account of what happened in the prison one Christmas Eve between an Orthodox Priest and his torturer:

“When I was in jail, I fell very, very ill. I had tuberculosis of the whole surface of both lungs, and four vertebrae were attacked by tuberculosis. I also had intestinal tuberculosis, diabetes, heart failure, jaundice and other sicknesses I can’t even remember. I was near to death.

At my right hand was a priest by the name of Iscu. He was abbot of a monastery. This man, perhaps in his forties, had been so tortured he was near to death. But, his face was serene. He spoke about his hope of heaven, about his love of Christ, about his faith. He radiated joy.

On my left side was the Communist torturer who had tortured this priest, almost to death. He had been arrested by his own comrades. Don’t believe the newspapers when they say that the Communists only hate Christians or Jews – it’s not true. They simply hate. They hate everybody. They hate Jews, they hate Christians, they hate anti-Semites, they hate anti-Christians, they hate everybody. One Communist hates the other Communist. They quarrel among themselves,

and when they quarrel one Communist with the other, they put the other one in jail and torture him just like a Christian, and they beat him.

And so it happened that the Communist torturer who had tortured this priest nearly to death had been tortured nearly to death by his comrades. And he was dying near me. His soul was in agony. During the night, he would awaken me, saying: ‘Pastor, please pray for me. I can’t die, I have committed such terrible crimes.’

Then, I saw a miracle. I saw the agonized priest calling two other prisoners. And leaning on their shoulders, slowly, slowly, he walked past my bed, sat on the bedside of this murderer, and caressed his head—I will never forget this gesture. I watched a murdered man caressing his murderer! That is love—he found a caress for him.

The priest said to the man, ‘You are young, you did not know what you were doing. I love you with all my heart.’ But he did not just say the words. You can say “love”, and it’s just a word of four letters. But, he really loved. ‘I love you with all my heart.’

Then he went on, ‘If I who am a sinner can love you so much, imagine Christ, who is Love Incarnate, how much He loves you! And all the Christians whom you have tortured, know that they forgive you, they love you, and Christ loves you. He wishes you to be saved much more than you wish to be saved. You wonder if your sins can be forgiven. He wishes to forgive your sins more than you wish your sins to be forgiven. He desires for you to be in heaven much more than you wish to be in heaven with him. He is Love. You only need to turn to Him and repent.’

In this prison cell in which there was no possibility of privacy, I overheard the confession of the murderer to the murdered. Life is more thrilling than a novel – no novelist has ever written such a thing. The murdered—near to death—received the confession of the murderer. The murdered gave absolution to his murderer.

They prayed together, embraced each other, and the priest was helped back to his bed. Both men died that same night. It was on Christmas Eve. But it was not a Christmas Eve in which we simply remembered that two thousand years ago, Jesus was born in Bethlehem. It was a Christmas Eve during which Jesus was born in the heart of a Communist murderer. **These are the things which I have seen with my own eyes.**” (Richard Wurmbrand)

“You will never be sorry for offenses, no matter where they come from, if you remember that Jesus was saturated with opprobrium for the wickedness of the very men He had benefited. Forgive everyone with Christian charity, keeping before your eyes the example of the Divine Master, who forgave even His tormentors before the Father.” (St. Padre Pio)

St. John Paul II, Incarnationis Mysterium, Bull of Indiction of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, November 29, 1998:

“Let us therefore look to the future. The merciful Father takes no account of the sins for which we are truly sorry. (cf. Is 38:17) He is now doing something new, and in the love which forgives He anticipates the new heavens and the new earth.”

As regards mercy, which is an essential part of forgiveness:

“Always speak and act as men destined for judgment under the law of freedom. Merciless is the judgment on the man who has not shown mercy, but mercy triumphs over judgment.” (James 2:12:13)

“Sweet mercy is nobility’s true badge.”
(William Shakespeare)

“Lord, do not hold this sin against them” for you are full of mercy and compassion for all. Please give me the grace to forgive so as to imitate your perfect love. (Chaplet for the Mercy to Forgive Another)

“Practicing forgiveness not only saves families from divisiveness, but makes them capable of helping society to be less heartless and less cruel. Yes, each act of forgiveness fixes the cracks in the house and strengthens the wall.”

(Pope Francis)



“This is the most important thing that we have to realize if we are not willing to forgive: no one is worth losing your soul over; no matter what they have done to you. I stress this over and over and over and over again. No matter what or how horrible a thing somebody has done to you, they are not worth losing your soul over by harboring hatred and unforgiveness. Please, I beg you, forgive somebody that is in your heart that you are refusing to forgive.”

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