

Forgiveness

Headline: Forgiveness is hard! Forgiving a family member or friend is one thing, forgiving strangers who hurt me without provocation these days just doesn't seem right. And yet, we are called to heroically forgive, seven times seventy times if necessary.

Objective: Each of us have suffered unjustified mistreatment that has resulted in significant pain, discomfort, or unwarranted shame. Instinctively our reaction is to fight back or to hold those who have harmed us in contempt. Yet, we are called to forgive.... just as Jesus forgave. Though the practical reality of forgiving can be extremely difficult, the transformative power of true forgiveness, at a personal and communal level, is undeniable.

Song Suggestion: Make Me a Channel of Your Peace.

Bible and Catechism Readings:

Psalm 32:5

Then I declared my sin to you; my guilt I did not hide. I said, "I confess my transgression to the Lord," and you took away the guilt of my sin.

Luke 17:3-4:

Be on your guard! If another disciple sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive. And if the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, 'I repent,' you must forgive him.

Matthew 6:14-15

If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions.

Catechism 2840

This outpouring of mercy cannot penetrate our hearts as long as we have not forgiven those who have trespassed against us. Love, like the Body of Christ, is indivisible; we cannot love the God we cannot see if we do not love the brother or sister we do see. In refusing to forgive our brothers and sisters, our hearts are closed and their hardness makes them impervious to the Father's merciful love; but in confessing our sins, our hearts are opened to his grace.

Catechism 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.

Catechism 1422

Those who approach the sacrament of Penance obtain pardon from God's mercy for the offense committed against him, and are, at the same time, reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by their sins and which by charity, by example, and by prayer labors for their conversion.

Saint: Saint Maria Goretti’s life demonstrates the transformative power of forgiveness. Born into poverty in Italy in 1890, Maria's life was marked by hardship and tragedy. At the age of 11, she was brutally assaulted by a neighbor named Alessandro Serenelli. Despite her young age and the severity of the attack, Maria forgave Alessandro before she died of her injuries.

Alessandro, initially unrepentant and sentenced to prison, experienced a profound conversion after Maria appeared to him in a dream. He sought forgiveness from Maria's mother and was eventually released from prison. He spent the rest of his life in repentance and prayer, eventually becoming a lay brother in a monastery.

Maria Goretti's forgiveness and Alessandro's conversion exemplify the power of forgiveness, showing how it can lead to repentance, reconciliation, and a renewal of faith. Their story has inspired countless people to seek forgiveness and extend mercy, reflecting the teachings of Christ on forgiveness and reconciliation.

Vignette: Mark had a longstanding rift with his father, stemming from a disagreement that happened years ago about a comment his father had made about Mark’s wife’s family. It was painful to hold this grudge and the bitterness weighed heavily on Mark's heart. Encouraged by his friends, Mark finally decided to reach out and reconcile. Fitfully, he wrote a heartfelt letter to his father, expressing regret and asking for forgiveness that he had overreacted by cutting off all communication. Weeks passed until one Sunday Mark received a call. It was his father, voice choked with emotion, extending his own “olive branch” and expressing a desire to mend their relationship. Mark was cathartic as he realized and felt the transformative power of forgiveness and the healing grace it brings.

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion:

Do you remember a time you were forgiven by someone? Do you remember how you felt and what was in your mind and heart at that moment?

Do you have trouble forgiving yourself? Why are you hanging on to the guilt? What steps could you take to resolve it?

How should I deal with someone who won’t forgive me even though I have told them I am deeply sorry?

How has going to confession helped in your need to forgive someone who has said they were sorry?

Resources:

Must I Forgive and Forget? Catholic Answers - January 2024

<https://www.catholic.com/magazine/online-edition/to-forgive-or-not-to-forgive-that-is-the-question>

Pope Francis: Forgiveness is the Cure that Heals the Poison of Resentment - National Catholic Register – September 1923

<https://www.ncregister.com/cna/pope-francis-forgiveness-is-the-cure-that-heals-the-poisons-of-resentment>

Does Forgiveness Mean the Other Person Gets Away with It? Catholic Voices - March 2021

<https://www.catholicvoices.org.uk/blog/does-forgiveness-mean-the-other-person-gets-away-with-it>

Action Plan:

Are there people in your life whom you have not forgiven or conversely haven't forgiven you? Consider seeking them out and asking for forgiveness or forgiving them.

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