



Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time | September 17, 2017

Teaching Forgiveness

By Judith Dunlap

Some families hang on to grievances like treasured heirlooms. They look for insults and slights. Belligerence almost becomes a way of life. Remember the Hatfields and the McCoys? They are the antithesis of Christian behavior. Being generous with our forgiveness is the hallmark of our faith. Teaching, celebrating, and living forgiveness are characteristics of the home church as well as the larger Church.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us that when we refuse to forgive we harden and close our hearts, making it

difficult for God's love to enter. Experts tell us that anger and grief that are harbored and rehashed can do physical as well as spiritual harm.

You do a great service to your children when you teach them to forgive and let go. When they have been injured, give them time to talk about their injury. Listen to and allow them to express their anger, grief, or frustration. Let them know they have a right to all of their feelings, but then help them see that hanging on to anger or grief for a long time is an uncomfortable way to live. Invite them to pray and ask God to heal their hurts and help them forgive, or even just want to forgive. Try to model this behavior by talking about your own hurts. Pray with your children, asking God to open your hearts to divine forgiveness.

In the Our Father, the prayer Jesus gave his disciples and his Church, we are reminded that forgiving others is the prerequisite for receiving forgiveness ourselves: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." When we open our hearts in an effort to forgive others, we allow God's loving forgiveness to enter. Inherent in that forgiveness is the mandate to pass it along. †

Harbored anger hurts you.

A Word From Pope Francis

We must not grow weary, then, of keeping watch over our thoughts and our attitudes, in order that we may be given even now a foretaste of the warmth and splendor of God's Face...which in eternal life we shall contemplate in all its fullness. Forward, thinking of this judgment which begins now....Forward, doing so in such a way that our hearts open to Jesus and to his salvation; forward without fear, for...if we ask forgiveness for our sins he will forgive us. This is what Jesus is like. Forward then,...which will bring us to the glory of heaven!

—General audience,
St. Peter's Square,
December 11, 2013



Sunday Readings

Sirach 27:30—28:7

Forgive your neighbor the wrong done to you; then when you pray, your own sins will be forgiven.

Romans 14:7-9

For this is why Christ died and came to life, that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

Matthew 18:21-35

[Jesus said,] "Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant, as I had pity on you?"

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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- How kind, patient, and forgiving am I on a regular basis?
- How kind, patient, and forgiving would others say I am?



How to Really Forgive

By Fr. William H. Shannon

Every day I say a prayer at least seven times which, if I truly thought about its full meaning, would scare me half to death. I say the Lord's Prayer, in which I ask God to treat me the way I treat others. I suspect—though I don't like to admit it—that I secretly hope that God will treat me much better than I treat others.

It's not that I'm a nasty person. At least I don't think I am. But there are times when I treat others shabbily and find it hard to forgive. Oh, I can go through the external motions of being gingerly polite, but rancor may still be in my heart. So let's admit it: It takes courage to say the Lord's Prayer. In this text from Matthew, Jesus is blunt: If you forgive, God will forgive you. If you don't forgive, God won't forgive you.

What does Jesus mean by such strong, demanding words? First, he does *not* mean that our God is a God of retaliation who says, "I'll show you. If you don't forgive I will get even with you. I won't forgive you either." The God Jesus reveals loves us and continues to love us, no matter what we do.

The point Jesus is making is more subtle. He is telling us that God, much

as God might want to do so, cannot forgive us if we do not forgive others. He is telling us that forgiveness cannot be received by an unforgiving heart.

Receptive Hearts

As I write this, I look out the window of my office where I see a cement sidewalk. I think to myself: How nice it would be if I could look out and, instead of seeing slabs of concrete, encounter a colorful group of lovely flowers growing in the middle of that space. I might even ask a friend who has a green thumb to plant such flowers there for me. But alas, much as he might want to please me, it is impossible for my friend to do so. The concrete is too hard to receive the roots of the flowers.

Likewise, a hardened heart can be no more open to forgiveness than concrete is to flower seeds. We need to have our hardened hearts softened and opened by God's grace so that God's loving forgiveness can flow into us and through us to others.

Gift of Tears

Do you remember the story of the Israelites in the desert protesting to

Moses that they have no water to drink? God ordered Moses to strike a huge rock with his staff and, behold, water gushed forth in abundance. Early Church writers often prayed for the gift of tears that would open their hearts and enable them to receive God's loving forgiveness. Indeed, in an older Latin missal there was a Mass for the gift of tears. (This Mass has been revived in the latest version of *The Roman Missal*.)

The opening prayer is strikingly beautiful and relates to forgiveness:

*Almighty and most gentle God,
Who from a rock made flow
A fountain of living water
For your thirsting people,
draw now from the hardness
of our hearts
tears of sorrow
that we may weep
for our sins and,
by your continued mercy,
be ready to accept their pardon. Amen.*

The situation may well arise when this lovely prayer will prove helpful for you. Clip it out and take it with you for safe keeping. †



Lord, I am grateful for your endless mercy. Give me the humility and courage to forgive those who have hurt me. Amen.

*From Grateful Meditations for
Every Day in Ordinary Time
Rev. Warren J. Savage and
Mary Ann McSweeney*

***Jesus tells us we cannot receive forgiveness
if our own heart is unforgiving.***

WEEKDAY READINGS

September 18–23

Mon. Weekday: 1 Tm 2:1–8 / Lk 7:1–10
Tue. Weekday: 1 Tm 3:1–13 / Lk 7:11–17
Wed. Sts. Andrew Kim Tae-gõn,
Paul Chõng Ha-sang, and
Companions:
1 Tm 3:14–16 / Lk 7:31–35

Thu. St. Matthew:
Eph 4:1–7, 11–13 / Mt 9:9–13
Fri. Weekday:
1 Tm 6:2c–12 / Lk 8:1–3
Sat. St. Pius of Pietrelcina:
1 Tm 6:13–16 / Lk 8:4–15