

20260913. Cycle A. XXIV Sunday in Ordinary Time. The Spirit of Forgiveness

At one time or another, we have all found ourselves in situations where we know we are called to forgive. Yet when someone has hurt us deeply, forgiveness can feel almost impossible. Why is forgiveness so difficult? How can we truly forgive someone who has hurt us and then move forward? And why does Jesus place such a strong emphasis on forgiving those who have failed us one way or another?

I was truly curious about the meaning of forgiveness and its practical application in our Christian Spirituality. The book "Way to Happiness" by Archbishop Fulton Sheen has a strong answer to these questions. Here is what I learned by reading Chapter 36, "The Spirit of Forgiveness."

There is a lot of hatred in our world today. One reason for this is guilt. A person who cannot forgive himself can easily begin to hate others. When we carry unconfessed sins, something inside us is unsettled. We want to feel better about ourselves. The right way to do that is to admit our sins, confess them, and ask God for forgiveness.

But sometimes we take the wrong path. Instead of admitting our own faults, we point to the faults of someone else. We make that person look bad so that we can feel better about ourselves. Sometimes, when we hurt someone we love, we begin to turn against that person. We may even convince ourselves that they are the problem... It is easy to move from love to hatred. But moving from hatred back to love is much harder. It requires us to be honest, admit our own faults, and seek forgiveness.

Another cause of hatred is fear. When people stop trusting God, they often begin to fear other people. They see others as threats. And when we are afraid, it is easy to become angry and hateful. But there is another type of fear, the fear of God; the fear of God is different. It is not the fear of a slave before a cruel master. It is the respect and reverence a child has for a loving father.

When we truly trust God, we do not have to live in fear of the world. We know that God is with us and will guide us through difficult times. But when we do not trust God, we can begin to see other people as threats. And that fear can turn into hatred. Hatred is dangerous because it can spread very quickly. One person becomes angry with another. That person becomes angry with someone else. Soon, anger becomes rage, and the cycle continues.

That is why Jesus told us, when we are struck on one cheek, to turn the other. That way, by an interior act of the will, we bring the chain of anger to an end. Jesus is teaching us to stop the cycle of anger and revenge.

The only way to destroy hate is for an individual to absorb it and, in his own heart, convert it into love. Such a course is difficult for us; we men have so small a reservoir of love within us that if we draw on it, it soon runs dry. We have then to find another source of love to forgive, a new and added quota of potential mercy. That is when we need God. We need God to give us the love and mercy that we cannot produce on our own.

There are two considerations which make it easier for us to ask God for help so we can forgive others.

The first consideration is a matter of plain fact: each of us has done worse things to God than any neighbor has ever done to us. That is why our Lord warns against seeing the speck in our neighbor's eye and ignoring the great beam in our own.

When we recall the offenses that God has forgiven us, then we realize that we are in no position to withhold forgiveness from a neighbor. Jesus puts it very clearly in today's Gospel passage: "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?" (Mt 18:32-33). When someone hurts us, let us remember how much God has forgiven us.

The second consideration moving us toward forgiveness can be reduced to this world. Suppose that some enemy has done us a very serious injury. But suppose that the father of our enemy comes to us and says that for years he has tried to make his son kind and good, but without success. Yet he has not abandoned hope, and he pleads with us to join his efforts to save the son. Such an appeal would soften our hearts. God is, in fact, such a Father. He, who is long-suffering with His rebellious children, wishes us to be patient with them too, to try to help bring them to an area of love.

This point is illustrated in a story told of Abraham in the desert. One night, a stranger is said to have approached his tent and implored his hospitality. Abraham gave him the best of food, surrendered his own bed, and waited on him. But the stranger complained and upbraided and found fault. Abraham was about to turn him out in anger at his ingratitude when God spoke to him. "Abraham," he said, "I have put up with that man for 40 years. Can't you stand him for just one night?"

Forgiveness is very serious. Forgiveness can affect your physical health, your mental health, your whole well-being. If there is someone in your life right now that you will not forgive, remember God has forgiven you everything. This week, forgive, release, go to confession, and allow God to cleanse your heart so that you can truly experience the freedom and release that he's offering you.

Remember that the ability to forgive others for their offenses comes to us only from God. He will not withhold the power if we ask for it. His own words tell us, "Be merciful, then, as your heavenly Father is merciful. Judge nobody, and you will not be judged. Condemn nobody, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. The measure you award to others is the measure that will be awarded to you." (Luke 6:36-38)

Sirach 27:30—28:7

Psalms 103:1-2, 3-4, 9-10, 11-12

Romans 14:7-9

Matthew 18:21-35