

How Can I Forgive?

By Lorraine Vincent

It's difficult to forgive. But Jesus commanded us to forgive. He insisted. One day, Peter, puzzled by His words, asked, "*Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me?*" [Then Peter thought he would make a very generous offer to forgive and asked,] "*Up to seven times?*" *Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times" (Matthew 18:21, 22).* Peter must have been shocked!

Why must I forgive?

In the Lord's Prayer, we pray to God our Father: "forgive us our trespasses, **as** we forgive those who trespass against us". Jesus explains, "*For 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" (Matthew 6:14).* Tough words! We see that our lack of forgiveness prevents God from forgiving us. His mercy cannot penetrate a hardened unforgiving heart. Our *Catechism of the Catholic Church, CCC, 2840*, states, "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".

The Sacrament of Reconciliation

In our Catholic Church we are blessed to be able to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. When we are angry and unforgiving we can go to confession to a Catholic priest to be reconciled with God. We can confess our sins of lack of forgiveness for our brothers and sisters, admit our weakness in trying to forgive, and ask for God's help. Jesus will be pleased with our good will, in that we are not refusing to forgive, but wish we could. Therefore, our hearts are not closed and hard, but open to His grace.

After making a **good** confession, we will receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation and be reconciled with God, through the words of the Catholic priest. Our loving and merciful God has the power to forgive us and wash our souls clean of all sins. We have to **believe** God has forgiven us, **accept** it and **live** it, by trying to do His will. God then gives us His grace, that is, His help, so we can go forth and forgive those who have hurt us. To do this we can speak to them and **tell them we have forgiven them**. "Forgiveness is the fundamental condition of the reconciliation of the children of God with their Father and of men with one another" (CCC, 2844).

Forgive from Your Heart—Pray!

Jesus gave us the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant, about a good king who forgave a slave a huge debt. But this slave went and threw a fellow-slave into prison who owed him only a very small debt. The king was furious with this slave and said, "*You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow-slave, as I had mercy on you? And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he should pay his entire debt.* [Jesus then said,] *So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not **forgive your brother or sister from your heart**" (Matthew 18:32-35).*

How do we forgive from our heart? What do we do? Jesus says, **pray!** "**Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:44, 45).** Therefore, our response must be to **pray daily** for these souls. This is because God loves **all** people, including great sinners, and wants all of us to come to live with Him in Heaven. He wants **everybody** to repent, to work hard at changing their sinful ways and humbly return to Him, asking for forgiveness—and our prayers can help them.

In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, Jesus shows us how God the Father embraced his repentant son, who had been a very great sinner, rewarded him with many gifts and took him into his house.

The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass

To forgive from our heart is a process, a course of action. Even while we are still wounded, in our pain, we can ask God to bless those who have wronged us and make them holy. The most powerful prayer is the **Holy Sacrifice of the Mass**. During the Mass we can privately offer these souls to God. **Compassionate prayer for the wellbeing of their souls** is very important. We can pray for ourselves, too. However, we must not harbour feelings of resentment, anger and revenge, but rather pray with genuine sympathy for those souls that are wounded by sin. Prayer gives us spiritual strength, bringing us closer to God and our efforts will be pleasing to Him.

Jesus Prayed for His Enemies

We are called to follow Christ. Jesus said, *“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you”* (Luke 6:27, 28). When Jesus was dying and nailed to the Cross, He forgave His enemies and prayed for them with compassion: *“Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing”* (Luke 23:34). We should imitate Jesus and sincerely pray for the souls of our enemies. *“This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you”* (John 15:12). He was scourged, crowned with thorns and nailed to the Cross! So what excuse do we have? Every time we look at a crucifix, we should think of this, and pray for those who have sinned against us. *“Christian prayer extends to the forgiveness of enemies, transfiguring the disciple by configuring him to his Master”* (CCC, 2844).

Can We “Forget” the Offense?

People around us tell us, “Forgive and Forget.” But how can we **forget** when we feel so hurt? Jesus did not command us to forget. He did command us to forgive, but did not tell us to forget. Our *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, **“It is not in our power not to feel or to forget an offense”** (CCC, 2843). This teaching makes sense. For example, a woman who was raped cannot forget that traumatic experience. But it doesn’t mean she should dwell on it and relive it constantly for years and years. Common sense tells us to try to put our terrible past experiences behind us and try to move on with our lives for good mental health and for the good of our souls. Once again, prayer is the answer.

Offer Our Sufferings to God

As we offer our wounded heart and sufferings to God, we should pray [intercede] for the person who hurt us, with compassion for that person’s **soul**. I like this prayer: **“Jesus, I offer You my sufferings** to be joined to Your Holy Passion and offered to our heavenly Father, in reparation for my sins, for (name) and for all souls, in union with all the Holy Sacrifices of the Mass throughout the world today”. As we try to **forgive from our heart**, our memory will gradually be purified by our daily **compassionate prayer**. Our Catechism states, *“the heart that offers itself to the Holy Spirit turns injury into compassion and purifies the memory in transforming the hurt into intercession”* (CCC, 2843).

The Holy Rosary

When we persevere in **daily** prayer for the soul of the person who hurt us, the anger and the bad thoughts will dissipate slowly and go away. Our Church recommends the Holy Rosary. If we pray the Holy Rosary every day,

we can include this particular soul in our prayers, asking Most Holy Mother Mary for Her intercession, so we can attain love, mercy and graces from God. Gradually the injury will turn into compassion and peace will flood our hearts. Don't give up praying every day, for weeks and months or maybe even years. I did—and now I am at peace. Isaiah wrote about the love God has for us, *“Those of steadfast mind You keep in peace—in peace because they trust in You” (Isaiah 26:3)*. We have faith that Jesus will be very pleased with our efforts and bless us.

The Divine Mercy Chaplet

The Divine Mercy Chaplet is an intercessory prayer that is prayed on the Holy Rosary beads. We can pray this Chaplet for our enemies, and for all souls. This prayer begs God the Father for graces for souls, based on the strength of Jesus' Passion. Jesus is Love and Mercy itself. He is The Divine Mercy. He wants all souls to be saved. In His great love for us, God gave this prayer to St. Faustina. She wrote it for us in her *Diary, Divine Mercy in My Soul*, 476: “Eternal Father, I offer You the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Your dearly beloved Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, in atonement for our sins and those of the whole world. For the sake of His sorrowful Passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world.” The Chaplet begins with the “Our Father”, one “Hail Mary” and the “I Believe in God”. Then the first part of the prayer, “Eternal Father...” is said on the Our Father beads of the Rosary. The last part, “For the sake of...” is said on each of the ten beads. After the five decades, the Chaplet concludes with, “Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us and on the whole world” prayed three times. To learn more about The Divine Mercy, check back to my previous articles on this website, entitled, “The Divine Mercy” and “Complete Pardon to Souls, Divine Mercy Sunday”.

Fast and Make Sacrifices

As we pray for a sinful soul, we can also fast and make sacrifices for that person. For instance, we can do something that is very good, but very hard to do, and offer our efforts to God for a particular soul. There is great merit in this because it is not easy. This action will also help us in the perfecting of our own souls, if we have an attitude of **humility**. Only God knows the state of all souls; and for all we know, the other person's soul might be in better shape than ours! If we feel we are superior, then we must humbly remind ourselves that the more graces and gifts we have, the more is expected of us. Our Lord says, *“From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded” (Luke 12:48)*.

St. Paul, Apostle of the Gentiles

St. Paul was given many graces from God in order for him to preach the faith far and wide, and much was expected of him. His letters show us the great number of people he forgave and prayed for, so that their souls would be saved. He wrote, *“Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. ...on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters... And, besides other things, I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches” (2 Cor 11:24-28)*.

St. Paul, in some ways, imitated Jesus as He prayed for His enemies while on the Cross; because despite all Paul's extreme sufferings, wounds, and trials that he endured, He prayed for those that hurt him and for the **salvation of all souls**. He wasn't angry or bitter about the terrible way he was treated. Instead he wrote to sinners, *“Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:31,32)*.

Persevere in Prayer

Compassionate prayer **attuned to God's compassion** unites us to Him. Our daily prayers for souls open our hearts and other people's hearts to God's graces, giving all of us consolation and heavenly light. Let us try to do God's will, persevere in prayer and trust in Him. God can do all things. With His graces we can forgive from our heart and be filled with the peace of God in the depths of our soul!