

Living the Spirit Forgiveness

While this insert was originally written for Lent, it's about a theme that is ever worth our meditation. At this time when the Holy Father speaks so urgently about forgiveness to be given to the Church for its sins and failures, we need to look to ourselves. It seems to me that there is one thing that we need to seek with greater intensity in our spiritual life. That is forgiveness. So often we come face to face with the need for this grace. And, we realize that without it we are truly not at peace with ourselves, with others and with the Church [God's People], and our God.

That is why when we come to our weekly Mass we find ourselves beginning our prayer with a short act of penance, seeking forgiveness for all those sins and weaknesses that encumber ourselves – and even for those that can be assigned to the whole world. After all, we are truly a part of the Church. We begin with a prayer, often the Confiteor, and we confess or admit that we have gravely sinned, through our most grievous fault.

When the Church makes this confession as a community of faith, it images the actions of the Lord Himself. Jesus, who was sinless, took on the sins of the world, not as some general accumulation of sin, but as encompassing all sin, even our own personal sins. Through His Passion and Death he offers the Sacrifice for all sins of every person in every age and time. The Mass is a real and true representation of that Sacrifice, though in an unbloody manner. It is through the Mass that we realize that the Lamb of God takes away the sins of the world, including those we have committed.

Forgiveness does not come to us as a solitary grace. It comes with a necessary love and compassion. In many ways it is a divine act to forgive. We reflect on how God uses forgiveness to help us change our hearts. We learn that through forgiveness we can become loving persons, compassionate in the eyes of others, because we have received love, compassion and forgiveness ourselves.

Forgiveness is at the center of the teachings of many of the world's religions. We see this in the observance of Yom Kippur, a Day of Atonement, the most solemn day of the year for Jews. In this observance faithful followers of the Old Covenant find peace. It is through this that they can move past old conflicts.

In the New Testament we find Jesus repeating messages of love and forgiveness. Jesus said of the sinful woman: *Many sins are forgiven her because she has loved much.* He said to the paralytic: *Your sins are forgiven you; take up your mat and walk.* He said in his teaching: *whenever you stand and pray, forgive if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.* Dying on the Cross he says: *Father, forgive them; they know not what they are doing.*

There is also the marvelous parable of the Prodigal Son, where Jesus reveals the boundless mercy of God as Father. In our Mass just before Communion, do we not pray: *Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us?*

In a Christopher News Notes I found this example of how forgiveness is not just to be in words said or even actions of repentance. It can be made a way of life. I read how the Amish forgave the gunman who killed five girls in one-room schoolhouse. They visited his parents and widow to let them know that they had forgiven him. And this was not an empty gesture. It was sincere and heart-felt.

When we come to ourselves, we need to ask what is there really that we cannot forgive. Surely, not when we live the Our Father. Not when we have the life of our spirit

attuned to the will of the Holy Spirit. If we do this, are there graces we may find ourselves blessed with? Yes, peace and hope. Science tells us that holding grudges makes a person stressful, and complicates bodily functions. Failing to forgive hurts us far more than any other. This knowledge is accepted by most people of learning.

Know that forgiving is not forgetting. Sometimes it is remembering. This is not easy to explain to you, but it is a truth that can be learned from experience. It may mean finally remembering another with love, a love that too often has escaped us. Recall that Jesus wants us to forgive and love our enemies, for their spiritual good and ours. Some actions may seem unforgiveable, but often we must admit that they have not taken away our freedom to forgive. We can find a way to let go the pain of memory. When we forgive we find that memory does not control us. We are spiritually free. How wonderful that freedom feels.

Finally, in this reflection on forgiveness, think about what we find in Luke 6: 37-38: *Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.*

Is this a time for you to escape condemnation? To allow forgiveness to bring you its grace of love – love overflowing with goodness, coming from God and becoming our very own. Let the forgiveness we seek be for ourselves from our loving Savior-God. Perhaps, it may be a forgiveness that we should give to another. “Today, forgive someone who has hurt you – or pardon yourself for a past mistake. Accept yourself and others, faults and all. You’ll be able to embrace today without resentment and, with the freedom to find inner peace, move on.” [Christopher Notes] Every day is a good time for us to move on in the journey of our life, a journey that began with God and will take us back to Him in His good time. Let us live our time of life to the full in our spiritual life.

Dear Friends, here is my own prayerful recollection on this subject, made to the Lord Himself. *“Lord, I know even after these many years I must admit that at times it seems so hard to give myself to performing acts of charity. So much else draws me to other activity. Then, Lord, I think of my past, as I often do, and remind myself how as a child I was taught to make little sacrifices during the Lenten season. I was blessed by a parent who hid that tempting candy! At school the Sisters, and later the priests who taught me, managed to encourage prayer. My friends and I would stay after school (high school) to say the rosary. I think of how easy it was to pray in the seminary – everything fell in order so well. Lord, teach me to pray now, today as I should. Let my prayers be from my heart. Let them unite me with You.*

Lord, I think of the possibility that I could do my part in advancing the good of the Church in these days. I could pray for the success of the Bishops’ campaign to save the rights of conscience in our beloved land. Give me the grace of strength to do just that. Let the words of my prayer be accompanied by good deeds. Lord, I know how indebted I am to those around me. I sometimes feel so helpless in returning goodness to them for goodness received. But I know I can ask you to pay my debts. Lord, I must close my reflection now. But I shall talk to You again. Amen.”

***God love and bless you always!
Monsignor David Morrison***