

Forgiving One Another

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In his commentary on the Gospel of John, Raymond Brown wrote that the power to forgive in today's Gospel is given not only to the Apostles but to each person in the Church as well. This does not mean sacramental forgiveness, but that each of us can free others from the multiple bondage that guilt creates. Fr. William Meninger in his book, "The Process of Forgiveness" wrote: "Forgiveness is demanded by the very nature of man and woman. It is not only divine, it is also human. God commands it because without it we are less human; with it we are more. Forgiveness is a human need and there are many reasons for it."

God our Father loves all of his children without condition and we are told to love one another in the same way. We must forgive because it is the only way to love as God loves, unconditionally. This must be the model and motive for our love for others. "Love your neighbor as yourself."

It is important from the very beginning to understand that the primary consideration and motive for forgiveness is ourselves. We forgive others in the first place for our own sakes. This is why God commands it of us. This is why it is a human need. It is only when we forgive that we are free. When we remain angry and vengeful towards another, we are letting another person determine the kind of person we are.

Jesus gave us the message of reconciliation. St. Paul said to the Corinthians, "God gave us the ministry of reconciliation." Fr. Meninger said, "Prayer is the way we receive and put into practice the message of reconciliation." Yet, many find it hard to forgive, and still others feel they cannot. Meninger continues, "Forgiveness is usually not a simple act of the will. It is often a process. We begin the process of forgiveness through prayer. At least we pray for ourselves to begin the process. We pray that God will lead us.

It is good for us to be aware of God's role in every step of the forgiving process. The Holy Spirit, whom the Father sends us, is the spirit of love and reconciliation. If we feel we can not forgive our enemies, all we have to do is to call upon God in prayer for his Holy Spirit. Forgiveness will proceed, then, not from us but from the Spirit of God. Prayer is the beginning of the journey towards forgiveness of others and towards self-healing. It is a way of recognizing and acknowledging God's movement towards us and God's gift of grace.

We pray in any way we can, vocal prayer, rosary or psalms. Pray for healing, for the power to forgive. At some point we should try to pray in our own words. Bring our hurts, our sorrows, our heartbreak, our loneliness to the Lord. Things we have never been able to say to another human being, we can bring to the Lord who already knows. God wants this from us because we need it. We need the opportunity to express our frustration, our sorrow, our sense of injustice or our rage. When we pray coming from any of these

feelings, we know that we have begun the process. The Lord will accompany us on the journey. There will be surprises in store for us. We will begin to see our responsibilities, our part in the forgiveness process.

ourselves. Individuals use these passions to rub salt into the wounds to prevent them from healing. It is only when we decide to stop hurting ourselves, permit the wounds to heal and allow forgiveness to happen that we will be freed from real self-inflicted prisons. A reason to forgive is our own happiness. It is strange that the reason we hold onto unforgiveness is that in some perverted way, we convince that ourselves that in not forgiving we contribute to our happiness. We must see that it wont. We are reluctant to forgive because it means we can no longer blame someone else for the course our life takes. All the people around us are affected by bitterness in our lives. We can break the cycle of injury and retaliation. We are called urgently to be peacemakers.