

FORGIVEN TO FORGIVE

Receive mercy, release resentment, restore relationships.

"Forgiveness is the oxygen that purifies the air of hatred." — Pope Francis

One of the hardest things in Christian life is also one of the most important: forgiveness. It is easy to forgive when the offence is small. But what happens when the wound is deep? When someone betrays our trust, damages our reputation, or breaks a family relationship?

The unforgiving servant in this weekend's Gospel represents every one of us. Before God, we are people who have received mercy. We have failed, sinned, said things we regretted, and hurt others knowingly and unknowingly. And yet God continues to say: "I forgive you. Begin again." St John Chrysostom, reflecting on this Gospel, says the master's generosity was intended to teach the servant to be generous himself. That is the foundation of Christian forgiveness.

We enter the confessional carrying our sins and we come out relieved that the burden weighing heavily on our conscience has been erased. Therefore, the first question is not "Why should I forgive that person?" It is "How much has God forgiven me?" Sometimes forgiveness begins simply with: "I am ready to begin again."

The first servant was released from a great debt but immediately became a prisoner of resentment by refusing to forgive his fellow servant who owed him little. We sometimes do the same. Someone hurt us and we replay the incident again and again. We say "I have forgiven," while secretly keeping the evidence carefully filed in our memory. St John Chrysostom says powerfully: "When we forgive not others, we forgive not ourselves." Resentment keeps us tied to the person who hurt us; forgiveness breaks the chain.

Corrie ten Boom knew this. After surviving a Nazi concentration camp, she met one of her former guards in a church in Germany. He had become a Christian and asked her: "Will you forgive me?" She later wrote that she did not feel forgiveness. She had to pray for the grace to obey Christ. And eventually, she took his hand. What a lesson — forgiveness is a decision, not a feeling. As Pope Francis teaches, "When you forgive, you do not calculate. It is good to forgive everything and always." St Pope John Paul II taught that forgiveness is not opposed to justice; rather, forgiveness and justice together are necessary for genuine healing.

Forgiveness is not simply about getting rid of anger. It creates the possibility of reconciliation. Sometimes it happens quickly. Sometimes it takes years. Sometimes the other person refuses to participate. And sometimes a relationship cannot safely return to what it once was. But even then, we can choose not to hate. We can pray for the person. We can stop seeking revenge and place the matter in God's hands. We can say: "I refuse to allow what happened to determine who I become." As St Pope John Paul II summarized: "No peace without justice, no justice without forgiveness." That applies to nations, marriages, families, friendships, and our parish community.

Finally, dear friends, Jesus asks us three questions this weekend: Who do I need to forgive?

What resentment do I need to release? What relationship might God be inviting me to restore?

As Pope Francis reminds us: "We must never tire of asking God's forgiveness, because only when we are forgiven can we learn to forgive." And if the wound is very deep, pray: "Lord, I want to forgive, but I cannot do it by my own strength. Give me the grace to forgive as you have forgiven me."