

Desire for Forgiveness

The Gospel encourages us to go even further: justice must lead to forgiveness; human societies cannot live without it. In many parts of the world, the wounds of history are deep. So let us dare to put an end to what can end today. In that way the future of peace, prepared in the heart of God, can be fully deployed. (Brother Alois, Letter from Chile)

Orla (Ireland)

From my upbringing, I have been taught that forgiveness is the way forward, that as human beings we can't live without it. If one human being can't forgive another, then what hope of peace is there, for a world that desperately needs peace? I have seen forgiveness happen in my life. I have seen the ability of one to prove their love to another by forgiving them, healing a long term family rift. A frivolous argument had caused two generations to avoid all contact with one another, even when passing in the street. Once both parties had accepted their wrongdoings and agreed to forgive, the family we should have always been was created.

In May of this year, a momentous occasion occurred in Ireland. For the first time since our country became a Republic after gaining independence from the United Kingdom nearly a century ago, our president invited Queen Elizabeth II for a state visit. The objective of the historic trip was to bridge the gaps that actions by our predecessors had created, inflicting deep wounds into our culture and past, and to start a reconciliation process between two nations that have had a very painful relationship. The Queen's first public port of call was to visit the Garden of Remembrance, a memorial garden in Dublin dedicated to the memory of "all those who gave their lives in the cause of Irish freedom." For me, along with thousands of other Irish civilians, the visit to the Garden began the process of forgiveness for the many ancestors of ours who were killed fighting for our nation's freedom. I believe that the two countries are on an ongoing road to a future of peace and happiness that would never have occurred had the first steps of reconciliation and forgiveness not taken place.

Believing in God's forgiveness does not mean forgetting offenses. The message of forgiveness can never be used to condone injustice. On the contrary, believing in forgiveness makes us freer to recognize our own faults, as well as the mistakes and injustices around us and in the world. It is up to us to repair anything that can be made good. On this difficult path we find an essential support: in the communion of the Church, God's forgiveness can be granted again.

Rachael (Kenya)

When our dad died in 1991, my mum was then a housewife left with three children (7, 5 and 4 years old) to support. My father's family, who were supposed to support us, did the opposite. After my dad's burial, my father's family sat down to divide his property. This act caused a rift in our relationship and for a long time I wanted nothing to do with my father's family.

As a Christian, I was reminded that forgiveness is a command from God and how can I expect God to forgive me, when I don't forgive others. In 2008, I visited my grandparents and the desire to forgive grew in me and with time I've been able to let go of the pain. In February 2011, my grandmother died and we were able to be there as a family. Our relationship is not perfect but it will get better.

Forgiveness is difficult, but it is something we have to do. It first starts with the desire to forgive, then to make the step and forgive. However deep you may be wounded, forgiveness is a choice you make and God gives us the grace and strength to do so. Once you have forgiven, God heals your heart in his own amazing way. I have made a choice to always forgive; it is something I have to do daily, with the little offenses and the big ones too. When I forgive, I'm at peace and I know my Father in heaven also forgives me.

There are situations where we do not manage to forgive. The wound is too big. We should then remember that God's forgiveness never fails. As for us, it is sometimes only by stages that we succeed.

Tom (England)

Reconciliation does not mean forgetting what has happened in the past but it means being ready to forgive. The words of John XXIII are real today, "Let us not seek out those who were wrong and those that were right... let us just say, 'Let us be reconciled'." At the beginning of this year I spent two months in Israel where this question of reconciliation was at the forefront of my mind. How can a country divided by so many walls say, "Let us be reconciled?"

Seeking to understand can be the first step in a trusting relationship. The desire for a future together can be a sign of an oasis of hope in a vast desert of division. We do not need to search for quick solutions but for long-lasting realities that can sustain the future for all involved.

Can we look to the peace of the Risen Christ in great nights of conflict? The reconciliation that Christ shows is one that bears the wounds of the past but is not totally defined by them. He beckons us forward in awakening a trusting communion which creates new possibilities of living together.

This is the true "Shalom" of God. For it is a peace that every human heart can know. This peace is a shared encounter. When we share this peace with those entrusted to us then walls crumble to dust. Forgiveness transmits this peace, even when all seems lost. Can Israel and Palestine be open to this peace? Do not forget the past, bear the wounds, but look to this new life that can flow when forgiveness is made real. Peace can be encountered even when doors seem locked (John 20:26).

The desire to forgive is already a first step, even when that desire remains engulfed in bitterness. By forgiving, God does more than wipe away the offense. He gives a new life in his friendship, rekindled day and night by the Holy Spirit.

Lorenz (Germany)

"I have swept away your transgressions like a cloud," God says in Isaiah 44:22. At the end of 2010, several young people from different European countries taking part in the Rotterdam meeting were sitting in the Maria van Jesse Kerk in Delft, reflecting about what God calls us to do by his forgiveness.

We understood these words as an encouragement to forgive as he does. "But in some cases forgiveness is really difficult," admits Hendrikje from Germany. "Where is the limit?" "I believe that God can forgive everything, because he knows the reasons for our behaviour; our past, our backgrounds, our environment..." I answer. "We have to ask God for forgiveness again and again," emphasizes Thomas from the Netherlands. "That is why you cannot abuse his mercy; even if we sin we have to trust in a God who forgives us anyway."

And what about the cloud swept away? "God can forgive, but he doesn't forget," states Ruben, also from Germany. This reminds me of the fact that the water which is the substance of a cloud never disappears, but only turns into another form. "We should try to forgive as God does, even if something is unforgettable," Thomas sums up. Susanna (Germany) quotes from Brother Alois' letter: "'The desire to forgive is already a first step.' This is a helpful thought."

During the prayers with tens of thousands of people from different cultural and confessional backgrounds, our desire to forgive our neighbour's human imperfection was expressed in an amazing way. Let's keep this readiness alive – also after Rotterdam!

And we can all make this discovery: forgiveness received or extended creates joy. Knowing that one is forgiven is perhaps one of the deepest, most liberating of joys. It is the source of the inner peace that Christ wants to communicate to us. That peace will lead us far; it will radiate outwards for others and for the world.

Aimé (Ivory Coast)

From 2002 up until the beginning of 2011, my country underwent a political crisis which led to the displacement of populations, with loss of human life and material belongings. I followed the crisis from France; it saddened me to witness the suffering and division of the Ivory Coast.

On the occasion of my visit to the Ivory Coast in July 2011, three months after the end of the crisis, it was a joy to notice that the country was trying to come to life again. In spite of the painful wounds, people are enlivened with exuberance and hope for a future of peace. Relations between friends, neighbors, colleagues...from opposite sides began to become warmer, little by little.

It would be a delusion, however, to think that the page has turned so quickly, because the wounds remain present. The time will come when the wounds will need dressing and forgiveness. The victims, on both sides, are awaiting justice, a fair justice and not a justice of the victors, which seems to me to be the first factor of reconciliation.

While being aware of difficulties that need to be overcome, the exuberance which enlivens the Ivory Coast and people's wish to rebuild their life makes me hope in a future of peace. This hope is supported by my Christian creed which teaches me that forgiveness and peace find their source in God. The Lord can help the Ivory Coast advance on this way of forgiveness and reconciliation.

When we pray in the Our Father: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive..." God's forgiveness already touches us. They are not empty words: something happens when we pray using those words which Jesus himself taught us. And then we are ready to forgive in our turn, and not condemn another person definitively when we have been wronged.

Abraham (India)

Forgiveness and the love of God are two terms which are often complementary to me. While reciting the Lord's Prayer, in the statement, "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us," the term, "as" used to make me think. Jesus requests us to forgive others, due to his immense love towards us. He never limited this to his words but also demonstrated it through his life; at every moment of his existence.

At a critical moment in my life, at the verge of loneliness and sadness, God's love which I had always neglected came to me through the Word of God. God came to me through the verse in the Bible, "you are beloved for me," which made me feel a sense of failure in front of his love and forgiveness. Recently during a week of silence, God made me realize the depth of his love towards us and how everyone, including me, is running away from this love. The entire life of an individual may not be adequate enough to have the fullest understanding of this love. And I feel that it is through forgiveness that we can spread the Love of Jesus, our Lord.