

Christ Jesus' Forgiveness Empowers Us to Forgive from Our Hearts

Jesus said, "Without me you can do nothing."

This is the fifth and last session on our journey together reflecting on God's forgiveness and his healing of our emotional and spiritual wounds. I stress again, as I did in our first session, that **this journey is a continuation of my past talks on prayer**. These talks flow out of Jesus teaching us to pray, *"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."* I can only experience the power to truly forgive others from my heart if in heartfelt prayer I draw on Jesus' power of forgiveness that he poured forth upon us from the Cross. Heartfelt prayer is nourished by the word of God from Sacred Scripture which was quoted throughout my first talk and in all these Lenten sessions. The words of Jesus in John Chapter 15 are especially true in our challenge and duty to forgive those who hurt us. *"I am the Vine, and you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him bears much fruit, apart from me you can do nothing"* (John 15:5).

Study of Scripture, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and theology as well as reading books by reputable spiritual authors and listening to talks on improving my prayer are absolutely essential. All these deepen my knowledge **about God** and correct misinformed views and attitudes of who God is. Ongoing education that deepens my knowledge and that informs my faith in the truths revealed by God must continue throughout my life. But knowledge **about God** must always lead to **deepening my personal relationship with God** as I spend time **alone with him in prayer**. Prayer is my personal response to God's calling me by name to experience daily his love for me within my life's experiences. Jesus said, *"When you pray, go into your inner room and shut the door and pray to your Father in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you"* (Matt 6:6). However, Jesus also draws us to pray **together in community with the People of God**. At the Last Supper with his disciples Jesus said, *"Do this in remembrance of me."* I can only fulfill this desire of Jesus, which he explicitly commands, if I celebrate the Eucharist around the altar of God with the Church, the People of God. **Quiet personal prayer alone with the Lord and praying in community at Mass with, in, and through Christ Jesus is the only way I can grow in a personal**

intimate relationship with the Lord who draws me to himself as he draws me to be in communion with those whom he loves.

Without this personal communion with Jesus, I may hesitate to approach him or the Father because I may have developed misguided views of God from what others told me about him. *The world, the flesh and the devil* continually influence me to fear the Father as a condemning judge rather than my merciful Father and healing Physician. In prayer Jesus will reveal his Father to me, and he will teach me about the Father's mercy. **As Jesus draws me more into the truth of who the Father is for me, Jesus will also grace me to have a deeper awareness of who I am. Jesus will enlighten me to appreciate my true dignity as the child of the Father and his forgiving love for me.**

However, as the truth of God's mercy dawns upon me, Jesus will also give me the courage to candidly face the truth about myself—enlighten me to be aware of my lack of a loving response to the Father's love, my shabby behavior and my self-serving attitudes. The more I trust in the Physician of my heart and soul, the more he will aid me to grow in the courage to abandon my defenses and admit my denials that blind me to my sinful actions. In prayer the Holy Spirit will enlighten me to grow in the awareness of how I tend to shift blame on others. Facing the truth about myself is very painful, that is why I often prefer to harbor an attitude of turning a blind eye to the reality who I truly am by focusing on the faults of others and by dwelling on the sinfulness of society. All this can be an avoidance to admit my own sinfulness. The fear of facing myself candidly, causes me to avoid asking the Holy Spirit for the light to see myself as God sees me. However, as I grow in the trust of God's love and his desire to forgive me, the Holy Spirit gives me the growing desire to entrust myself to God and to be enlightened to acknowledge just how sick of heart I am. Praying and pondering the word of God in Scripture increases within me the desire to return home to the Father who awaits to embrace me. The Holy Spirit will give me the courage to come to the Lord to confess my sins and receive his forgiveness of my guilt and healing of the shame that results from my sinfulness. **Receiving forgiveness then leads me and empowers me to forgive others.**

In our previous session we focused on forgiving those who sinned against me. To repeat, forgiving a person from my heart is beyond my human capacity. In this session we will continue to address the need to forgive others who hurt us. To better understand the degree and the nature of the hurts I experienced, it

may help me to recognize the various people who hurt me, what motivated them, and under what circumstances the offenses or abuse took place.

Reflecting Prayerfully on Those Who Hurt Me

The struggle to forgive varies with the depth of the hurts I experienced, often depending on who hurt me. I may regard some hurts as being so slight that I see no need to forgive those who caused them. And on the other hand, some hurts are so great that they pierce the depths of my heart. It may also help to reflect on the motives of the persons who hurt me, why they interacted with me and that led to my being wounded. It also helps to consider the time in my life when I may have been more vulnerable and the nature of the occasion when I experienced this wound. The following breakdown may help to ponder the various people who hurt me and how memories of past hurts can easily surface when least expected.

- 1) It is a well-known truth that those whom we love the most deeply are often those who hurt us the most deeply. They may be father, mother, siblings, other family members and dear friends. The sting of these hurts can be very deep indeed because we may have been very vulnerable and helpless as toddlers or young children when I experienced them.
- 2) As the circle of widens there are neighbors, co-workers, and members of communities we belong to. We live and work with them. We relate to these people often or even daily. As a consequence, we may experience a pattern of being irked or offended repeatedly because we relate with them on a regular basis, and we are continually reminded how they have hurt us in the past.
- 3) More broadly, there are those we interact briefly and unexpectedly: their selfish behavior, anger, or abruptness rub us the wrong way—in traffic, while shopping, in business dealings, clients, or learning of their crimes or political ambitions in the media. These hurts can be slight or simply irksome, while others may be severely painful—especially when graphically shown on TV or on the internet.
- 4) Moreover, something that we hear, or some current experience may surprisingly awaken a childhood experience that disturbs us—when, in

the past, we were hurt by those in authority: parents, teachers, priests, coaches, or class bullies in middle or high school. In some way all these hurts bruise our sense of self-worth. Because they are buried deep in our identity. The feelings attached to memories lie dormant and are stirred and surface to remind us that we must forgive these people seventy times seven as Jesus tells Peter. They remind us of our frail wounded human nature and that time does not heal all wounds, as is erroneously repeated.

By forgiving all of these, I set a prisoner free, and I discover that the person I set free is **my very own self**. To aid in this journey of forgiving others, it may help me to consider how the various ways I was hurt and on what occasions.

Reflecting Prayerfully on Four Types and Depths of How We Were Hurt

Accidental or innocent hurts: I experience these hurts when someone accidentally caused me some pain, or some loss. On becoming aware of the accident, the person involved often apologizes and promises to make amends. He or she may experience great pain at causing me pain. Nevertheless, that person did affect me negatively, whether intending to or not. I, nevertheless, felt the physical pain or the loss or damage to my possessions or property. Even in these situations, I need to forgive when that person says, *“Please forgive me. I am so sorry.”* And yet, it may not always be easy to let go of the hurt or shake the memory of pain, loss or inconvenience. No matter how I may try to shake it off, some irritation may still linger. Being polite or excusing and saying, *“That’s OK”* is certainly appropriate and kind, but it does not go far enough. I must strive to forgive the person from within my heart before the Lord. All damage or inconveniences that have caused me pain needs to be forgiven. Forgiveness is not blaming the other; it is setting that person free as we;,, not only by my polite words of forgiveness, but also by asking the Lord to quiet the heart of the one who caused the accident and to set him/her free from guilt or embarrassment. And by so doing, I also ask God to free and set me free of unacknowledged anger or ignored resentment.

Perceived hurts: These occurred when I was disciplined as a child by a parent, teacher, coach, or priest. And it also occurs now as an adult when I am corrected by a family member, a spouse, a friend, a boss, a co-worker, a customer or client. In all cases, I needed to admit my shortcoming and learn a lesson for my personal growth or for the good of the family or for the people I serve and the company where I work. But at the time, I *perceived the correction* to be too demanding or an affront to my dignity. If I hold on to the pain or embarrassment that I experienced at the time, these “*perceived hurts*” can accumulate and foment an attitude of self-pity in my heart and over time may cause me to be distant from family, friends or a boss and possibly embitter me and create a rebellious spirit against those in authority. Forgiving these hurts at the time or later in life is essential. As I do this, I invite Christ, the Truth and Light, into these experiences and into these memories. Over time, the Holy Spirit will enlighten me to see the truth of what I experienced. The Spirit of Truth will enable me to see more clearly, through his vision, that those corrections were for my own good. Over time as the “sting” of being “reprimanded” or corrected fades, the Spirit will reveal them to be blessings in disguise for my growth and expressions of love and concern for my wellbeing. Yes, the way I was corrected may have been better expressed, but nevertheless their motives and the lesson I learned was ultimately for my good.

Truly damaging hurts caused by those who carry unhealed wounds of resentments and unforgiveness in their lives:

These people were hurt but they have neglected or refused to forgive and heal what still troubles them. The dark spirits of resentment, which we addressed in the last session, have poisoned their ability to relate to people with respect. They have been wounded emotionally and spiritually and this infection seeps into all their relationships. They foster a disposition of being defensive and combative—ready to attack before being hurt again or suspicious of being used by others. If they are in authority, they are controlling out of the need to cover up the inner nagging of their own insecurity. They prove the old adage: “*People who are hurting, hurt others.*” They *react* out of the pain which they had received as children from parents, teachers, bullies, or as adults from being hurt by family, a spouse, in-laws, co-workers, bosses, or from being “overlooked” or rejected by someone they loved, but whom they believe “dumped” them. Anger or passive aggression grows within as they rehearse

and nurse past grievances. They grow a “tough skin” and tend to be defensive and harsh with the same attitudes of those who wounded them. As difficult as it may be, I must forgive them, or I will become like them, a “*wounded wounder*” myself—irritable, defensive, distant, unfeeling, or harsh.

Destructive hurts caused by malice: When a person nurses anger, it develops into *resentment*, and nursed resentment over time can cause a person to *hate*. And hatred foments revenge and opens a doorway to the evil one to worm his way into their hearts. Hatred grows to the extent of exercising power to dominate and to cause pain to others even to the point of torture and murder. Malice is the clearest work of evil. It is the work of the devil whom Jesus called “***the father of lies and a murderer***” (John 8:44). Malice killed Jesus and the spirit of evil is out to arouse hatred, despair, fear, to confuse and ultimately to kill us. Every morning we pray the Cantic of Zachariah, “***God promised of old that he would save us from our enemies and from the hands of all who hate us***” (Luke 1:71). Obviously of all the hurts we can experience, these “enemies” are the most difficult to forgive. But those who killed Jesus out of malice were the very ones Jesus forgave on the Cross. Of all the wounds inflicted upon us, it is for such enemies that we experience our greatest need to invoke the power of the Blood of Christ to forgive.

The Path to Freedom, Peace and Joy Is Living in the Forgiving Love and the Freedom of Christ:

Jesus is clear that we must forgive all who hurt us, to be set free of their power over us. But as the above review of people and occasions reminds us, fulfilling his command can be exceedingly difficult. I repeat, ***we can only forgive from the heart by the mercy and strength of Christ Jesus who forgave us all.*** At every Mass we hear the words of Jesus, “***This is the Chalice of my Blood, the Blood of the new and eternal Covenant. It will be shed for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins.***” Each time we receive Communion, we receive his Blood of forgiveness. In and by his Blood he empowers us to forgive. Christ Jesus lifts us from the pit of our bondage of unforgiveness and resentments and empowers us to forgive with the strength of his forgiving mercy and love

In all that was expressed in our five sessions together, we must start with and continue to journey in life with baby steps as we beseech the Lord for the strength to forgive those who hurt us in any of these four types of hurts. If we do not, the result is that without realizing it, buried anger from hurts, slight or grave, can foster a negative attitude that casts a shadow of gloom over our lives and causes darkness to grow within us. Gloom and darkness bring with it a judgmental spirit, bickering, quarreling, complaining, cynicism, depression, loss of hope and harmful escapes that lead to addictions of all kinds. We see this darkness at work in families, neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, clubs, politics, the media, industry, charitable organizations and in the Church and parishes which claim to be communities of faith in Christ. **Paul wrote to the Galatians, “For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word. ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ But if you bite and devour one another take heed that you are not consumed by one another”** (Gal 5:13-15). Neglecting or refusing to forgive those who hurt me causes me to “hug my hurts.” It robs me of joy and creates an inner emptiness.

Ponder These Lenten Reflections in the Light of the Holy Spirit:

Meditate on the Word of God and Pray to the Father and to Christ Jesus

“Be angry but do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger and give the evil one to opportunity to work on you. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander and malice be put away from you. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgive you. (Eph 4:26,31-32).

Jesus said, "I am the Vine, and you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him bears much fruit, apart from me you can do nothing.... If you abide in me, and my words abide in you ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you. By this is my Father glorified that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.... If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before you... but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than the master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.... In the world you will have tribulation but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world.'" (John 15:5, 7-12, 18-20; 16:33).

"On the evening of that first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' When he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. And the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said again, 'Peace be with you.' As the Father has sent me, I also send you.' And when he said this, he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any they are retained.'" (John 20:19-23).

“Jesus himself bore our sins in his body on the tree that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but you have returned now to the Shepherd and the Guardian of your souls ” (I Peter 2:24-25).

***“This is the Chalice of my Blood, the Blood of the
New and Eternal Covenant.***

***It will be shed for you and for many, for the
forgiveness of sins.***

Do this in memory of me.”

“By his wounds you have been healed.”