



# Words on Forgiveness

"Now - and this is daunting - this outpouring of mercy cannot penetrate our hearts as long as we have not forgiven those who have trespassed against us. Love, like the Body of Christ, is indivisible; we cannot love the God we cannot see if we do not love the brother or sister we do see. In refusing to forgive our brothers and sisters, our hearts are closed and their hardness makes them impervious to the Father's merciful love; but in confessing our sins, our hearts are opened to his grace. "

Catechism of the the Catholic Church # 2840

"All through the lives of the saints there is this "laying down of life," not the taking of it, this forgiveness, with no thought of revenge, this overwhelming love that overcomes fear, this loving to folly, the folly of the Cross."



Drawing by  
Melanie Morrison

"We only love God as much as the person we love the least." -- Dorothy Day

"As Jesus spoke these words, he looked down from the cross at the people who had scourged him, beaten him, spat upon him, and shouted for him to die. But Jesus knew that his Father's love included them, too. To the Father, we are all his children, created in the image of God. Did they know that Jesus on the cross was the son of God? Dear Lord Jesus, may we graciously forgive those who have insulted us. May we reach out to all who hate us, just as you did on the cross, when you spoke these words "Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing."

by Fred Schaeffer, SFO

"Jesus Christ, whose way of life I try to follow, refused to meet hate with hate and violence with violence. I pray for the strength to be like him."

-- Would Jesus pull the switch by Sister Helen Prejean

"In our society, forgiveness is often seen as weakness. People who forgive those who have hurt them or their family are made to look as if they really don't care about their loved ones. But forgiveness is tremendous strength."

-- Helen Prejean

"Forgiveness is the name of love practiced among people who love poorly. The hard truth is that all of us love poorly. We need to forgive and be forgiven every day, every hour--unceasingly. That is the great work of love among the fellowship of the weak that is the human family."

-- Henri Nouwen

"Forgiveness does not come easily. Hatred and vengeance seem to come more naturally to us poor human beings [...] But through the prophet Ezekiel, God promises to send a new Spirit to change our hearts of stone into hearts of flesh. We need the Holy Spirit so much today in order to see others, who are different, as a brother, a sister, a friend, and not as an enemy." -- Letters of Jean Vanier - L'Arche Canada

"When we judge, we are pushing people away; we are creating a wall, a barrier. When we forgive we are destroying barriers, we come closer to others." -- Jean Vanier

"This forgiveness from the cross is the image and principle of that forgiveness that Jesus wishes to convey to all humanity through his sacrifice. To merit this forgiveness and, in the concrete, the grace that purifies and confers divine life, Jesus made the heroic offering of himself for all humanity. All men, each in the individuality of his own personal "I," of his good and evil, are therefore potentially and, indeed, one could say, intentionally included in Jesus' prayer to the Father, "Forgive them."

-- "Father, Forgive them..." John Paul II, General Audience — November 16, 1988

"Forgiveness may seem like weakness, but it demands great spiritual strength and moral courage, both in granting it and in accepting it. It may seem in some way to diminish us, but in fact it leads us to a fuller and richer humanity, more radiant with the splendour of the Creator."

-- John Paul II, Message for the World Day of Peace 2002

"Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

"Forgiveness is not an occasional act. It is a permanent attitude."



"We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love."

-- Martin Luther King

"This is what Jesus meant when he said, 'Love your enemies.' And I'm happy that he didn't say, 'Like your enemies' because there are some people that I find pretty difficult to like. Like is an affectionate emotion. But I can't like anybody burning my home. I can't like anybody who would exploit me. I can't like anybody who would trample over me with injustices. I can't like them. I can't like anybody who threatens to kill me day in and day out. Jesus reminds us that love is greater than like. Love is understanding, creative, redemptive, good will for all men."

-- Martin Luther King



"It is by forgiving that one is forgiven."

"If we really want to love we must learn how to forgive."

-- Mother Teresa

Let us repeat that prayer in the hour when the wicked assail us,

Let us repeat it now, and say, 'O Father, forgive them!'"

Few were his words of rebuke, but deep in the hearts of his people

Sank they, and sobs of contrition succeeded the passionate outbreak,

While they repeated his prayer, and said, "O Father, forgive them!"

-- Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

"He who cannot forgive breaks the bridge over which he himself must pass."

--George Herbert

"Forgiveness is the giving and so the receiving of life."

-- George MacDonald

"Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."

How easily we could be on the other side in this—the matter of the execution of Jesus the Galilean, son of Mary and Joseph.

From another perspective, we would cite justice. After all, a trial was held, a charge supported, a punishment determined. Law enforcement officials were carrying out the will of the people.

From another perspective, we would cite honor, justice, due process. We would say: criminal, law breaker, rioter, maybe even terrorist.

From another perspective, we could easily be the prosecutors of this crime, the executors of this punishment: the people calling for justice—Crucify him!—the official washing his hands of responsibility and consequences, the public joining in the frenzy of vengeful invective, the soldiers honorably discharging their duty.

We could easily be the friends who watched and did nothing, the friends who stayed away—hid in fear and shame, the friends who said nothing against the sudden rush of popular opinion, the friends who denied they ever knew him.

We think we know what we are doing; we think we are in control, but by these words, Jesus reminds us that we don't and we aren't. For Jesus has a way of seeing the world slant, of upending our cornerstones of logic, reason, justice, and righteousness. Jesus reminds us that our ways are not God's ways, our justice is not God's justice.

Jesus is our only cornerstone, and the way of the cross, according to Jesus, is this:

To be vulnerable  
To be humble and meek  
To utter no words in defense of ourselves when we are wronged  
To lean our heads toward the crown of thorns  
To still the hand that takes up the sword  
To forgive our enemies

If we are truly the Body of Christ, then we are called to imitate Jesus, our only cornerstone: to do as he did, to speak as he spoke, to love as he loves.

Can we follow the way of the cross?

Father forgive us, we don't always know what we're doing.

Kathleen Horton  
Good Friday Reflection  
The Seven Last Words  
Used with permission

The graphic at the very top of page 1 of this document is a detail of *The Prodigal Son* by Giovanni Buttaci© Used with permission

<http://4Catholiceducators.com>