

“Forgive your neighbour the hurt he does you, and when you pray, your sins will be forgiven.”

“And that is how my heavenly Father will deal with you unless you each forgive your brother from your heart.”

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In one sense we might say that the heart of today’s scripture readings is very straightforward, quite easy to understand, and yet to put it into practise is a very difficult thing to do.

Our Lord is asking us to show forgiveness to those who have hurt us in any way. These hurts may be minor skirmishes, or they may have resulted in life-changing circumstances.

Most of us will struggle to forgive others who have hurt us, and we find it difficult to let go of resentment and of bearing grudges. A neighbouring priest friend kindly sent me an article he had been writing about overcoming resentment. He quotes Nelson Mandela who said that resentment ***“is like drinking poison and then hoping it will kill your enemies.”*** On being freed from prison Nelson Mandela also said ***“As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn’t leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I’d still be in prison.”***

We can all think of examples of exceptional people, like Nelson Mandela, who have shown forgiveness to those who have caused them, or those close to them, considerable harm.

I have always been uplifted by the example of a Father whose daughter was killed in an IRA explosion in Northern Ireland. During a television interview he spoke very movingly of his willingness to forgive those who had taken his daughter’s life.

We might ask ourselves what enables a Father to show such forgiveness; what has moved his heart to be able to offer such a precious gift.

I think that part of the answer lies in this person’s Christian Faith. He had imbibed the teaching and example of Jesus and he has been able to show forth a Christian response to a personal tragedy.

He had come to appreciate how great a price Our Lord had paid to redeem us from sin and death, and in this moment of suffering and anguish had allowed the grace of Christ's mercy to shine forth. He had come to appreciate the extraordinary nature of God's love and mercy towards himself. As the psalmist says:

“My soul give thanks to the Lord and never forget all His blessings. It is He who forgives all your guilt, who heals every one of your ills, Who redeems your life from the grave, who crowns you with love and compassion.”

Our Lord is asking us to follow a more radical path which will require continual conversion and grace.: “ Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” “Grant pardon and you will be pardoned.”

It involves a dawning realisation, as Saint Paul says in today's second reading, that ***“The life and death of each of us has its influence on others; if we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord, so that alive or dead we belong to the Lord.”***

Our Lord wants us to realise that our words and actions, our daily living can have an incredibly positive influence on others. As members of Christ we are to give off the aroma of His Mercy and Forgiveness. Think of the Oil of Chrism with which we were anointed at our Baptism and again at our Confirmation. This Oil has the perfume of Balsam added to it precisely to show how attractive the Christian way of Life is; what sweet fragrance we exude when we show God's mercy and compassion in our own lives.

Let us pray for one another this coming week that we may be given to grace to forgive and also if we are the ones who are being forgiven that we might accept this forgiveness with a grateful heart.