

FROM THE PASTOR

My dear brothers and sisters,

Last week, I wrote about the Works of Mercy. This week, I'm going to start get specific. We'll start by looking at the Spiritual Works of Mercy. The first work we will look at is **forgiving wrongs willingly**. In this Year of Mercy, I think this is a very important one with which to start, for it shows, most clearly, how we pass on the mercy that God has given to us.

Of all of the Works of Mercy, this can be one of the hardest ones to do. When someone wrongs us, it is painful, and, in fact, it can be *very* painful. We often hold on to unforgiveness as a defense mechanism – we think that if we hold on to this unforgiveness, it protects us from the aggressor. While there are certainly times that we need to protect ourselves and others, unforgiveness ends up *hurting us* far more than it hurts the aggressor. Unforgiveness holds us bound and keeps us from freely loving God and neighbor. This is clearly seen in **resentment**. Resentment means “to feel again.” Whenever the memory of the offending person arises in our minds, if we feel the anger and hurt all over again, this means we are resentful. This can lead to all sorts of physical problems!

Spiritually, unforgiveness puts a wedge between us and God. When we hold grudges, we hurt our relationship with God. When I was a preteen, I was arguing with my sister (it only happened that once, right?). My mother asked me to stop arguing. I stopped ... but then my sister would get another jab in. I felt I had to give another jab, but my mother said, “It hurts me when you fight with your sister.” I didn't get it. I wasn't fighting with my mom – I thought it had nothing to do with her! Because of her love for both of us, it pierced her to the heart when we would fight. This can be translated to our relationship with God. Each of us – every person that God has made – is deeply beloved by God. When we fight, argue, or hold unforgiveness against each other, God's Heart is pierced. As a loving Father, He is hurt by our division.

What exactly is forgiveness? First, we need to see what forgiveness is *not*. Forgiveness is *not* saying that there was really no offense, that what the person did was okay or good. Forgiveness is not saying that we are going to put ourselves in the way of harm. Forgiveness *is* a choice, not just a feeling (in fact the real forgiveness may be there before the feeling enters). Forgiveness is saying that I am giving up my right for revenge. Forgiveness is saying, “I give up the power this anger has on me.” Note that forgiveness does not mean we forget what happened; rather it means that we remove the power it has by not allowing ourselves to be ruled by our anger and hurt.

How do we forgive? As I mentioned above, forgiveness is a choice of the will – we have to choose to forgive. The **first** part of forgiveness is **to pray for the person**. This may take time – days, weeks, months or even longer – before we can bring ourselves to pray for the person. The **second** part is asking God for the **desire to forgive**. Amid the pain, if we have a desire to forgive – even if it is only to be freed from the anger and hurt – then we are moving in the right direction.

The **third** part of forgiveness is the **prayer and choice of forgiveness**. In the example with my sister, this prayer can look like this: “In the name of Jesus, I forgive my sister for continuing to argue with me, even after Mom told us to stop. In the name of Jesus, I forgive my sister for making me feel stupid by not listening to my side.” So what's going on in this prayer? First and most importantly, it is done *in the name of Jesus*. Jesus' name has power. We can't forgive on our own, but Jesus can forgive in us, and give us that strength to forgive. Second, the prayer is *very specific*. We do not forgive generalities, we forgive persons: I named my sister. I also named the *specific circumstance*, and *how it made me feel* – which is where the pain comes from. The more specific and real we can be as we forgive, the more power the forgiveness will have.

Please know that forgiveness is often not a “once and done” thing. Usually, we need to forgive the offense today, and tomorrow, and the next day and so on. While we may not feel the forgiveness at once, the healing *will* come if we persist, and we will find that the power the unforgiveness held over our lives will eventually disappear. Please know, too, that this is for the usual wounds of life. For some wounds, especially things that cause PTSD, there may need to be professional counselling before a person can come to the point of being able to forgive. If you are in this situation, you can start praying to be able to forgive, and God will lead you (long though it may seem) to the help you need to forgive.

I pray that this Year of Mercy will draw us all to the Spiritual Work of Mercy of **forgiving wrongs willingly**.