

FORGIVING AND FORGETTING

The first reading and the Gospel this week call us to treat others (even your enemies) “as you would like them to treat you.” We know exactly how we like others to treat us: we like them to be forgiving, merciful, generous, and loving. But how many of us could say that we treat others in that way?

First Book of Samuel (26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23) shows us how jealousy, envy, and hatred destroy every human. It describes Saul, who is jealous of the young David and pursues him, seeking to kill him. But the just Lord delivers Saul into the hands of David and his companions. David gets an opportunity to kill Saul, but he will not do so because he believes it would not be right before God.

I was reminded of an old story taught in catechism classes: A primary class teacher told each child to bring a plastic bag containing potatoes. Each potato was to be given a name of a person the child hated. When the day came, every child brought some potatoes - some had two potatoes; some three, while some had up to five potatoes. The teacher then told the children to carry with them the potatoes wherever they went (even to the restrooms) for one week. Days passed, and the children started to complain of the unpleasant smell of the rotten potatoes. And those having five potatoes also had to carry heavier bags. After one week, the children were relieved because the game finally ended. The teacher asked, “How did you feel while carrying the potatoes with you for one week?” The children aired their frustrations and complained of the trouble they had to go through to carry the heavy and smelly potatoes wherever they went. The teacher said, “This is exactly the situation when you carry your hatred for somebody inside your heart. The stench of hatred will contaminate your heart and you will carry it with you wherever you go. If you cannot tolerate the smell of rotten potatoes for just one week, can you imagine what is it like to have the stench of hatred in your heart for your lifetime? Too often we think of forgiveness as a gift to the other person, and it clearly is for ourselves! So, learn to forgive and forget.”

ACKNOWLEDGE OUR PAIN: The first step in forgiving is to acknowledge our pain to God. I am sure David would have cried out to God and told Him of his pain and hurt. David would have felt as did the psalmist: “My eyes are tired from crying so much; I am completely worn out. I am exhausted by sorrow, and weeping has shortened my life, I am weak from all my troubles; even my bones are wasting away” (Ps. 31:9-10). As we place our wounds before the Great Physician, He will begin to administer healing to us, as David did with Saul.

PRAY FOR THOSE WHO HAVE HURT US: David teaches us the Christian quality of forgiveness, and the Gospel (Luke 6:27-38) offers these words of Jesus: “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” Jesus knew that the only way for us to overcome hurt is to pray for those who have hurt us. How? We can ask God to help us and to soften their hearts so that they can receive His peace and love. It is not easy to pray for the persons who persecute us. When I began praying for my offenders, I felt insincere. But as I continued to pray for them, I began to desire that God bless their lives.

FORGIVING DOESN'T MEAN THE OTHER PERSON WILL CHANGE: Forgiving someone doesn't guarantee a perfect relationship. We cannot make our offenders love us. That is not our job. We are called to love others.

LOVE OUR OFFENDERS: How can we possibly love someone who has so badly hurt us? Well, the Lord still loves and cares for us in spite of our imperfections and drawbacks. As we continue to pray for our offenders, love may grow. The Lord enables us to love those who have done us harm. In 1Cor.13, love is described as never keeping a record of wrong doings.

WE REALLY CAN FORGIVE: It may sound impossible to forgive the one who has hurt us, but it is possible. All we have to do is begin. God doesn't ask us to do the impossible. As we begin to follow His way, He is there to help us.