

September 17, 2023



Photo by Sr. Karin Nürnberg, CSJ, from the Abbey St. Hildegard in Eibingen, Germany

THE MANDATE OF FORGIVENESS

By Sr. Jane DeLisle, CSJ

Excerpts from Today's First Reading and Gospel

*Wrath and anger are hateful things,
yet the sinner hugs them tight.
The vengeful will suffer the LORD's vengeance,
for he remembers their sins in detail.
Forgive your neighbor's injustice;
then when you pray, your own sins will be forgiven.*

SIRACH 27:30-28:3

*Peter approached Jesus and asked him,
"Lord, if my brother sins against me,
how often must I forgive?
As many as seven times?"
Jesus answered,
"I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times."*

MATTHEW 18:21-22

Reflection

As an observant student of human nature, it is easy to understand the mandate from Jesus to forgive one another. There are too many reasons not to live in anger, or hold a grudge, or condemn one another. When I watch the evening news, I am often prodded toward anger that surges up within me. Yet, anger that seethes and occupies my vision and dissipates my energy does nothing to change a situation and only serves to make me feel powerless and miserable.

While I need to know what is going on in our beautiful yet wounded world, I need not be consumed by anger or despair. Rather, I am called to the good, to forgive, to love my dear neighbor with whom I live -- and the ones across the nation and world. No easy endeavor. To do this, I must move from ego-space to soul-space. I cannot take things so personally and need the long view of the good of all. I pray to see as God sees.

When I am focused on hurt and perceived injustice, I cannot begin to give someone the benefit of the doubt or move to forgive. It is only when I step back and dwell on God's abiding presence and love that I can acknowledge the wrong, reframe my experience of it, and move toward forgiveness. Sometimes, I realize that "there but for the grace of God go I."

Out of my experience of being loved by God, I am always invited to respond with love and try to see from the other's perspective. All too often wounded people strike out against the other for self-protection. Hatred, bitterness, resentment, anger have their place as a warning sign that there is something wrong or dangerous -- but that cannot be the place I live in the everyday. I can choose to act against, step away, ponder and discern the best way to proceed with caution and curiosity. I ask myself what makes the actions of the other so hurtful to me.

If I/we seek to love as Jesus loved, then stepping back and approaching from a place of mercy and compassion is essential. I do not need to accept the misdeed; the wrong has been done. I cannot respond in like manner. The behavior that is hurtful is not acceptable and needs to be addressed. AND, the person is more than their deeds.

I am to love the other as if he/she were me. The realization is that we are all one, woven from the same "star dust." Stepping back allows me to see myself in the other and the other in me. Once this insight is realized, I am better able to determine how to best respond in a way similar to how I would like to be treated. I pray for the grace to see God reflected in the other and in myself.

Love is a good reason to forgive; and forgiveness is a good way to love as God loves.



Morning walk
Photo by Sr. Jane DeLisle, CSJ

For Pondering

- What enables me to see the good in the other and forgive misdeeds?
 - How have I experienced forgiveness in my life? (from others and of myself)
 - What graces or help do I need to see the other as myself?
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For Prayer

"Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make my heart like your own."

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