

Forgiveness and its Blessings

“Be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven you.”—Ephesians 4:32

MY OLDER BROTHER has been a pianist since age 5 and by practicing many hours a day (up to 8 hours a day in his late teens) the muscles in his fingers were unusually strong. When we were children he would seize me by the wrists to restrain me, not realizing that his grip was extremely painful. Since struggle only worsened the pain, my only recourse (because kicking wouldn’t work!) was to bite, and *that* worked to release his powerful grip. My brother and I have a harmonious relationship today, so why does the memory of this incident from long ago keep recurring in my consciousness? Could it be that because I never apologized, or that he never said he was sorry, this minor skirmish will not disappear into the subconscious until verbal apologies are exchanged? Does it really matter whose fault it was? How many of us go through life carrying needless baggage because we do not forgive! Is it really easier to carry the pain, the emotional hurt with us year after year? clogging the waking state with unresolved grievances?

No one I know would ever physically bite anyone, but yet I’m fairly certain that we all do, on occasion, bite with our tongues. With sharp and sarcastic words we bite our brothers and sisters, our equally suffering fellow travelers going through this sometimes difficult world school. We so easily lose touch with our spiritual base from



Created by Ariel Agemian exclusively for the Confraternity of the Precious Blood

While humble contrition for sins is part of their expiation, the experience of self-forgiveness is often initiated by being forgiven by others and by nurturing love and care for them. The text for the above illustration is, “Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little”—Luke 7:37-50.

which we should be making our decisions of acting *and* speaking. The stresses of modern day living and working are sometimes just too much! We may even shock ourselves by the sarcasm or bitterness emanating from our thoughts, too! A relationship will not endure for long if forgiveness is not a part of it.

When a disciple asked the Christ, “How many times should I forgive my neighbor? Until seven times?” The Christ answered, “Until seventy times seven times!” With all the emotional stresses of everyday living, even seven times seems like too much! But remember Romans 12:19? “Vengeance

is mine: I will repay saith the Lord.” He repays, we may forgive.

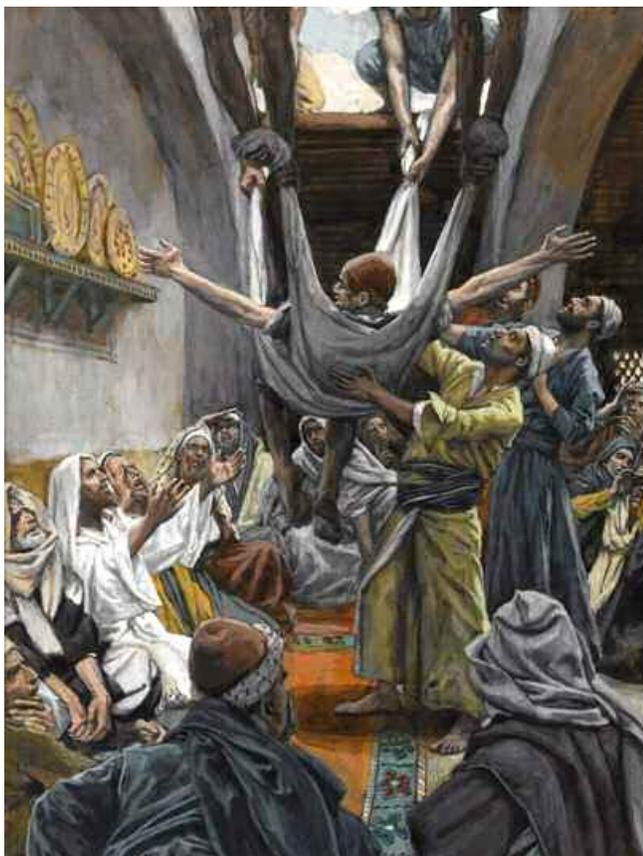
Is it pride that keeps the mouth shut? Sometimes remorse can loosen the tongue and open the lips to let forgiveness begin. But many cannot “lose face”—PRIDE! So, the unforgiveness remains like an outstanding check. The moral bank balance is not reconciled until, perhaps, another life in another environment but under similar circumstances. Yes, the mills of the gods do grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly fine. We cannot escape our obligations or unresolved problems.

A young lady from Grand Rapids, Michigan moved to the Puget Sound area of the State of Washington to escape a painful and unresolved problem. Within two or three months the same problem reappeared in Washington. Only after two stormy years and much forgiveness was it resolved.

We must learn to overcome evil with good. Insults, slights, false accusations, hurts of any kind, are really opportunities to practice the power of forgiving. And who benefits from forgiving? Why, the one who forgives! An “evil” has been overcome with good. The world’s most significant act of forgiveness occurred at Golgotha when the Christ uttered those most gracious words, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” It is difficult for the world to understand such profound love as this. Worthy is the Lamb!

Good health has a link to forgiveness. A person’s unforgiving, unrecognized sinful nature can lead to many kinds of illnesses. The Bible is instructive on this point. The forgiveness of sins is curative: “But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins (he said unto the sick of the palsy), I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house. And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God” (Luke 5:24).

An unforgiving attitude can certainly affect the health of a person, especially if it is of long duration. Mary, a friend of many years, grew up with three favored brothers on a truck farm in Ohio. Unfortunately, Mary was not favored. Her parents were hard working and good providers, but she received no evident love during her young, forma-



Watercolor, J. James. Tissot (1836-1902)

The Palsied Man Let Down Through the Roof

This illustration for Mark’s account of the healing of the palsied man (2:2-12) is nearly identical with Luke’s version (5:18-26). Both emphasize the man’s extraordinary faith-based determination and the implicit correlation between his former sin(s), now apparently atoned for, and his physical debility. Christ’s forgiveness restores the healthy body’s archetype.

tive years—no hugs, no praise, no goodnight kisses or kind words, just, “hurry up” and, “do this and be quick about it”—no loving support, just criticism. Mary left home the morning after her high school graduation with something akin to hatred for her parents. For decades the hatred ate away at Mary until, in later life, she was suffering from high blood pressure, kidney failure, diabetes, poor eyesight and heart trouble. I tried to convince Mary of the benefits of truly forgiving her departed parents.

We teach that many we meet in this life we have associated with in a prior life, the harmonious relationships stemming from loving, stress-free associations in the past. But with difficult persons (the thorn-in-the-side types), we likely have unresolved problems to work out—amends to make, services to render, or a loving relationship to cultivate. The

two antagonists may come together in another lifetime in a different relationship. Perhaps the cruel, unloving parent comes again as a child or the spouse who brings the two antagonists together in another lifetime. Dislikes, fear, and hatred must eventually be redeemed as love for one another. I told Mary that all I ever wanted from her for my birthday or Christmas was for her to tell me that she had forgiven her parents. I must have asked for that gift more than a dozen times over the years and finally, sometime during the last half year of her life, she released all the hurt and resentment for neglect and forgave her parents. But of course, her health was ruined after so many years of bitter tears and stubborn unforgiveness. She died an early death.

Yes, one's attitude can affect one's health. Some of the most outgoing and cheerful people have crippling arthritis. I have known two very special people with a terrible arthritic condition affecting nearly every part of their body. Jeanne was a middle aged member of our prayer group in Michigan, a warm, loving, cheerful, spiritual person, always smiling. But she held a deep-seated and nearly unconscious resentment over many years for an uncle who lived with her, her husband and children. Though he stayed away a good part of the day, he still was an intruder in this family's life. On the surface she welcomed him and treated him kindly, but subconsciously she resented not having just her own family in the home. She told me this after we had some group discussion on various causes of illness, including arthritis.

How important it is for us to examine our secret self, to discover unconscious attitudes, to make amends—to forgive. To facilitate this process we are privileged to know and use the Rosicrucian Fellowship evening exercise in which we review the events, speech, acts, emotions and thoughts of the day in reverse order so that we may discover the causes of our actions and attitudes. We forgive, if need be, first by prayer and then by subsequent word or deed in the coming days.

Even if we are yet unable to see it, we must always remember that the ever-present unseen world coexists with that of the dense physical. One can forgive the departed, or living persons residing at a great distance, by contrite, silent or spoken

prayer. The spoken word can travel far in the etheric. It has been said that “love” is the telephone connection that traverses all of space, and forgiveness is an expression of love.

When we pray that part of the Lord's prayer which petitions, “Forgive us our trespasses [or sins] as we forgive those who trespass against us,”

God, the Silent Witness, like the eye in a needle, watches the continual threading of our thoughts through time. There is no such thing as being alone with our thoughts.

do we actually *feel* forgiveness for others? Have we meditated on this phrase of the Lord's prayer often enough? Did not the Christ say that before leaving your gift on the altar, reconcile yourself with the person you should forgive? If we forgive, our Heavenly Father will also forgive us; if we don't, the consequences are too disturbing to contemplate.

There is an enlightening parable in the book of Matthew about the servant who owed his king 10,000 talents. The king was about to send this servant to prison until he paid all. But the servant fell on his knees and begged for patience, and the king had compassion and forgave him the debt. This same servant demanded from a fellow servant 100 pence owed him. The second servant likewise begged for patience and promised to repay all, but he was not forgiven and was thrown into prison until he should pay the debt.

When he learned of his servant's unforgiveness and lack of compassion, the king was angry and sent the evil servant to the tormentors until he should pay all that was due the king. The Christ concluded the parable with, “So likewise shall my Heavenly Father do also unto you if you *from your hearts* forgive not everyone his brother their trespasses” (Matt. 18:35, italics added). The key phrase here is “from your hearts.” Lip service will not suffice.

Man cannot contemplate God and *not* ask for forgiveness of sins because in his heart of hearts he

knows his own weaknesses. His conscience, if he is honest with himself, will every time show him his fallen state. The devotee truly needs forgiveness to proceed further on the spiritual path. "For Thou, Lord, art good and ready to forgive, and generous in mercy unto all that call upon Thee" (Psalm 86:5). If God can forgive us through Christ, do we also *accept* it and forgive ourselves? If we can forgive a relative, friend, or even a stranger, should we not also be willing to forgive ourselves and not brood over past errors? Some of us are inclined to bring up the old errors of our youth, and even childhood, repeatedly reviewing them with remorse and asking over and over for God's forgiveness. Once or twice will be enough if we are sincere. Then we may accept God's forgiveness as given and attend to the business (including the errors!) of today, moving on in the confidence and trust that as His children we are loved by our Heavenly Father, and are given what we need to accomplish all that He has set before us.

Dedicated work is just as much a part of the spiritual path as study and contemplation, prayer and meditation. "He that doeth the will of my Father in Heaven, the same is my mother, my sister and brother," Christ said. Belief and faith without works is dead. We have the blessed assurance that Christ forgives us and will be with us always. "He that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." This glorious promise holds if we love others as Christ has loved us.

Do we realize that God is the ever-present witness at the place of our thinking, who knows how well we are living our minutes, hours, and days? God, the Silent Witness, like the eye in a needle, watches the continual threading of our thoughts through time. There is no such thing as being alone with our thoughts. If our thoughts were suddenly to become audible, would we be able to control them? Would it not be to our advantage to examine and evaluate the kind of habitual thinking we do? The record of our thoughts and subsequent actions are the sum and substance of our life, the only thing we get to take with us after physical death. If we will meditate on our ability to think rationally, we will come to understand that it is a miraculous gift. What we do with this wondrous ability will

PRAYER AND DEEDS

No answer comes to those who pray
Then idly stand
And wait for stones to roll away
At God's command.
He will not break the binding cords
Upon us laid
If we depend on pleading words,
And do not aid.
When hands are idle, words are vain
To move the stone;
An abiding angel would disdain
To work alone;
But he who prayeth and is strong
In faith and deed,
And toileth earnestly, ere long
He will succeed.

—Author Unknown

largely determine the direction and quality of our life.

In one respect, thinking can be likened to the radiation of atomic energy. As long as the flow of radiation continues uniformly it is effective, and energy (as selfless, positive thought) is available for our use. If the flow is restrained and confined in a small area (as selfish and negative thought), the collisions of radiant energy may have explosive and destructive results. Our thoughts are meant to be positive and creative, ever expanding outward like the sun's radiant life, but when thoughts are held close in a vortex of selfishness, creative energies express themselves erratically, sometimes destructively, to the detriment of both thinker and his environment. While living on the physical earth we may be considered embodied "tools" of God. If we have consciously chosen to walk the path of spiritual illumination towards initiation, we have vowed to use the "tools" of thought, word and deed in a selfless and loving manner. In which direction do the scales of selflessness and self-centeredness tip in your life? □

—Virginia Schroeder