

## **FORGIVE US ... AS WE FORGIVE ...**

*[Italicized quotes – Pope Francis – General Audiences on Apr. 10 & 24, 2019]*

After asking God for our daily bread, the “Lord’s Prayer” goes into our relationships with others. We ask the Father to “forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Mt 6:12). Just as we need bread, we also need forgiveness, every day.

A Christian at prayer asks God first of all that his debts – his sins, the bad things he does -- be forgiven. Even if we were perfect people, pure saints, we would still be children who owe everything to the Father. The most dangerous attitude for every Christian is pride – standing before God thinking, “I’m perfect.” But it wasn’t the Pharisee in the parable who commended himself who was forgiven, it was the tax collector who humbly admitted his sins and asked for God’s mercy.

*There are sins that are seen and sins that are unseen. There are glaring sins that make noise but there are also sins that are devious, that lurk in our heart without us even noticing. The worst of these is pride, which can even infect people who live a profound religious life. ... Sin divides fraternity; sin makes us imagine we are better than others; sin makes us think we are comparable to God.*

We are all sinners before God and have reason to repent. “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” (1Jn. 1:8)

We are debtors above all because we have received much in this life – family, friends, the splendors of creation – and life is a grace, a gift from God. If we are able to love, it is not solely by our own strength, but through the grace of God. Like the moon reflecting the sun’s light, others reflect God’s love to us, helping us to understand that therein lies the meaning of life. And we are indebted to God through them.

*And this is the mystery of the moon: first and foremost, we love because we have been loved, we forgive because we have been forgiven. And if someone has not been illuminated by the light of the sun, he becomes icy like the ground in winter. ... None of us loves God as much as he has loved us. It is enough to place oneself before a Crucifix to understand the disproportion: he has loved us and will always love us first.*

In teaching us to ask for forgiveness, Jesus goes beyond our relationship with the Father and involves us in a new relationship with our brothers and sisters. We ask the Lord to forgive us “as” we forgive the people who have done something bad to us.

We know that the merciful Father forgives everything and always. But God’s Grace, so abundant, is always demanding. Those who have received much must learn to give much. If you are forgiven, you must learn to forgive others.

We aren't looking for God to learn from our actions, but for us to learn from his, inviting him to withhold forgiveness from us if we will not learn to share it with others.

*If you do not forgive, God will not forgive you. You close the door. Let us consider whether we are able to forgive or if we do not forgive. ... But if you cannot do it, ask the Lord to give you the strength to do so: Lord, help me to forgive.*

We see here the connection between love of God and love of neighbor. Love attracts love; forgiveness attracts forgiveness. If you don't strive to forgive, you won't be forgiven; if you don't strive to love, neither will you be loved.

Not everything in life is resolved with justice, with a perfect balance between the wrong done and the reparation. To put a stop to evil, sometimes one must love beyond what is due, in order to restart a relationship of grace. Evil knows revenge, and if it is not stopped, it risks spreading, suffocating the entire world.

*Jesus replaced the law of retaliation — what you have done to me, I will do to you in return — with the **law of love**: what God has done for me, I shall do for you in return! ... (Consider) whether I am able to forgive. And if I do not feel I can, I must ask the Lord to give me the grace to forgive, because knowing how to forgive is a grace.*

*With a word, an embrace, a smile, we can pass on to others the most precious thing we have received. What is the most precious thing we have received? Forgiveness, which we too must be able to give to others.*