

SUNDAY PLUS



Forgive and forgive and forgive

A Year of the Word

Seventy times seven?

by Sr Janet Fearn FMDM

Is Jesus asking too much? How can we forgive someone "seventy times seven"? Isn't there a limit? We've all sometimes thought that saying sorry is all very well: someone's behaviour must change. It's too easy to make a superficial and meaningless apology that never heals hurt.

Brad (not his real name) served a prison sentence for murder. He repeatedly and unsuccessfully attempted to apologise to the grieving family of his victim. He tried to think of something he could do to prove to them the depths of his sorrow. Brad eventually thought that they might feel better if he were to kill himself as a return for the life he had taken. Fortunately, he realised that suicide was not the answer: living and changing his life for the better would prove that his victim had not died in vain.

Perhaps the family will never accept the depths of Brad's genuine sorrow for his actions. Perhaps, if they do forgive him, it will need

a conscious act of forgiveness every remaining day of their lives: that is the "seventy times seven" of which Jesus is talking. It's a forgiveness which goes far beyond that which is needed for, yet again, leaving the bathroom light switched on or for squeezing the toothpaste tube in the middle.

Real sorrow for causing pain and real forgiveness both require someone's wholehearted, life commitment. Saying sorry and saying "I forgive you" might both need to be said "seventy times seven" – and the offender and the offended will find healing, even if it takes a lifetime.

Sr Janet Fearn is a Franciscan Missionary of the Divine Motherhood.

"We should remember that 'we love first of all because we have been loved; we forgive because we have been forgiven.'"

Pope Francis

Take the plunge

by Paul Higginson

A little boy was praying, asking God to bless each of his family members, but left out his brother. "Why didn't you pray for Sam?" said his mum. The boy replied, "Because he hit me." Mum said, "Don't you remember, Jesus said to forgive your enemies?" And the little boy replied, "Exactly! He's not my enemy, he's my brother!"

It's great to be forgiven – we expect it from others. But we find it difficult to forgive and sometimes refuse to do it, often to those closest to us.

However, we hurt ourselves by

failing to forgive. It hardens our hearts: turns them into "hearts of stone", and makes us bitter and resentful. Of course, many people have suffered terrible wrongs in the past at the hands of others. Hence forgiveness is not a forgetfulness of the past: it is to risk a new future other than the one imposed by the past or by its memory.

Paul Higginson is the Assistant Principal at the Catholic Sixth Form College in Harrow and has been a parish catechist for thirty years.

Dearest Lord, I'd love to be able to forgive everybody who has inconvenienced or hurt me in some way, but sometimes it's such a hard thing to do. My memory gets in the way and reopens wounds that I'd thought had been healed. Help me, Lord, to say "I forgive you" and really mean it. ☪ Amen.

Worth the risk

by Martin Delaney

My father was an alcoholic, so we got used to being second to what had the greatest hold on him. There were many times when he did things that needed forgiveness, and it was hard to offer. Often I, like Peter, thought, "How many times?" But all the elements that came with his alcoholism, which made our lives hard, also pierced him. He just hid the pain, consuming himself in the process.

I had been so consumed with my own anger and pain, I had not realised the impact of forgiveness: its almighty power and grace to heal, not only me, but my father too. Fortunately, I discovered this with enough time to have a relationship of sorts. Then, being with my Dad when he died, meant that forgiveness was not the struggle it once felt. It is the grace God gives us in the pain of loving. Forgive and forgive again. It is always worth the effort.

Martin Delaney is an actor, writer and personal development coach. He is best known for his work in Oscar-winning *Zero Dark Thirty*, *Now You See Me 2* and George Clooney's *Catch 22*.

Dear Parishioner,

It is with much delight that we can return to the public celebration of Holy Mass. A warm welcome back! We have all lived in the wilderness for too long, some of us ending up feeling lonely and afraid.

We can now enjoy a long-awaited return to the community celebration of our faith, to togetherness, to being nourished and fed by the Bread of Life.

Let us give thanks for all that we have received, all that has been taken away, and all that has been left behind. It is our intention to repeat this message in our Newsletters to remind us to reflect on the past and rejoice in the present as we reunite around the altar to receive, once more, the Eucharist.

Today:
Ecclesiasticus 27:30 – 28:7
Romans 14:7-9
Matthew 18:21-35

Monday:
Numbers 21:4-9
Philippians 2:6-11
John 3:13-17

Tuesday:
Hebrews 5:7-9
John 19:25-27
or Luke 2:33-35

Wednesday:
1 Corinthians
12:31 – 13:13
Luke 7:31-35

Thursday:
1 Corinthians
15:12-20
Luke 7:36-50

Friday:
1 Corinthians
15:35-37, 42-49
Luke 8:4-13

Saturday:
1 Corinthians
15:35-37, 42-49
Luke 8:4-15

Next Sunday:
Isaiah 55:6-9
Philippians 1:20-24, 27
Matthew 20:1-16