

*Harden  
Not Your  
Hearts*



*The Gift  
of  
Forgiving.....*

## Acknowledgements....

It is with the deepest gratitude that I wish to *thank*....

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## Dedication.

It would be impossible for me to complete this little book of reflections and inspirations without mentioning two very special men who had such an impact on those around them and who were each in their own way crucial to the Host Apostolate.

Both men died this year within two weeks of each other. Both suffered heroically and with great faith. Each had a very different spiritual journey but they became great friends as we their wives already were. Remarkably both died with great dignity and in spite of converse medical statements, peacefully and totally surrendered to the Will of the Father.

Dave Brown was an associate of the Host Apostolate whose encouragement and support was matched only by his excellence at computer matters and which led to the setting up of the web site and transcribing of all the Locution. His knowledge and expertise of computing was unsurpassed as was his dedication. Sometimes he amazed me with his questions and sheer determination to get things into print when perhaps I might have been dilatory. In some way this also led him finally to the Catholic church shortly after his illness was discovered.

Both men died of cancer, of different types and often joked about death in the last months. They courageously battled with their illnesses and kept on 'giving' till it became impossible.

Michael my Beloved, Darling husband and co-founder, never wavered in his enthusiasm for the Apostolate or in his loving and grace filled support of me, many a time working, sitting with me when he could no longer actually assist, say perhaps to dictate and no pleading on my part would make him leave me alone to complete a task. Often I had to use my tiredness as an excuse to get him to rest. His clarity of vision and his conviction was a major asset to me and his ability to endure remarkable. A man of many gifts especially of friendship and love will make him a great loss to many and especially to myself.

Dave and Michael were wonderful Husbands and Fathers. (Michael a step father of no lesser love for that). Both were men of great prayer and principle.

For Celine and I they are totally irreplaceable and grievously missed but their love still bears us up.

In the weeks following the funerals this little book was born.. I believe that somehow they are part of it.....

I therefore thank them with a heart full of gratitude. I bid them eternal rest and the enjoyment of Gods friendship and love.

Dave Melvyn Brown 3rd. February 1948 - 29th March 2008

Michael Anthony Holman 19th April 1935 - 13th April 2008.

# Forgiveness...

## Reflections on Gods gift and Man's destiny

To err is human to forgive, divine. Alexander Pope 1809-1849.

Forgiveness is one of the most challenging and the most demanding calls of our time. In the core of our world are so many acts and experiences that require us to forgive when what we have seen, witnessed, been exposed to, at the hands of others, whether this be in close relationship, family, education, work, community, or in nation against nation, in war or even in catastrophe seem 'unforgiveable'. We have all experienced to a greater or lesser extent some form of hurt at the hands of others and indeed may possibly be the cause of this to someone. Whether this is to the smallest degree, an unkind word or action or the seemingly unforgiveable act of violence, physical or emotional leading to what appears to be something so terrible in our eyes that it can never be forgiven, such as murder, rape or betrayal or injustice, we are all called by our profession of faith to find it in our hearts and spirits to forgive. Yet this call to virtue somehow eludes us and we prefer to stay with our unforgiveness rather than change in order to facilitate a transformation of our hearts.

Yet we have been forgiven so much probably more than we can comprehend or realise by those closest to us. Parents, husbands and wives often ignore the many times that they have had to forgive. Friends carry each other through many trials and tribulations. Communities at odds can and do learn to forgive each other and so do nations - leaving successive generations to marvel at these acts of for-giving or are even surprised at the extent of communication between them. For-giving is so obvious in any love situation that it does not even need to be named.

True forgiveness neither requires to be named or up-fronted. It simply is realised in a continuation of relationship. While it clearly exists it seems to be hidden from our consciousness to such an extent that when a challenging situation arises we do not draw upon it. Thus we do not recall or chose not to remember how we had once forgiven but instead put up barriers, resort to anger, frustration and finally hatred which in turn makes forgiving almost impossible.

These situations which lead to hatred differ in every person and every community. We all seem to have a 'no-go' area. Something bites so hard so that we hurl ourselves into a darkness of distrust and resentment and refuse to confront the nature of our hidden selves - choosing to close the door on the other.. This can be so pervasive that it affects whole generations and becomes institutionalised and in the end nobody even recalls the initial act that led to the dispute or hurt.

We have a God, Father Son and Spirit who in spite of all our human frailty, has forgiven us - and forgets our faults and failings if we but seek his forgiveness. He has and does call us to be at one with Him, to love as He loves even to the point of shedding our blood. He has already done this for us.

Crucified, broken, deserted, abused betrayed, hung in solitary passion and in abject desolation he cries to His Father-- Where are you?... and yet at the same time pleads.. Father forgive them for they know not what they are doing. (Luke 23: 32-36)k

The Man - God forgives when all has been accomplished at the cost of unbelievable pain and suffering. Forgiveness an attribute of a Merciful God.

Forgiveness as shown by Jesus on Golgotha is the key to our journey to wholeness and surrender to a loving and Merciful God. If we cannot forgive then we cannot love. As he himself said... 'What merit is there in loving only those who love you'-- even the pagans do that.( Mt.5 43-47). He calls us to do as he did to those who persecute, hate or belittle us. But to do this we have to develop a forgiving heart, a forgiving nature willing to excuse and to try to remedy our unforgiveness. We have all, probably, experienced our shortcomings in this sometimes justifying our behaviour as having been 'sinned' against rather than sinning. Of course this may indeed be so. There are terrible crimes committed against individuals and societies. We have only to look at the genocide of the past and indeed present centuries. Inexcusable acts of torture and evil. These can never be justified or remain unchallenged.

To forgive without any recognition of the wickedness of the action taken is to some extent to condone it or at least, in part, to accept that such actions do not constitute grave error, injustice and evil. Without this understanding we simply allow a kind of 'free for all' and forgiveness becomes another form of 'laissez-faire (leave well alone) exposing us to a kind of 'anything can be justified or done society', anything goes.....

We are duty bound to forgive but we are entitled to know by what right others attack us or others especially if we are innocent of any fault. Jesus asked of the high priests 'by what right do you arrest me'. Yet again we also have the paradox of Divine forgiveness, "Father Forgive them for they know not what they do" (Luke 23 34-35 )

It is somehow in this paradox, in this land of understanding wrong doing and not condoning it and yet being willing to forgive the person or persons that wrong us that the virtue lies.. Wholehearted forgiveness by man is also dependent on the wrong doer seeking forgiveness from us.

This is also a paradox for we *can* forgive without this by pure grace. God working from within us. But true forgiveness and true reconciliation happens when both parties communicate with each other accepting joint responsibility where appropriate or the wrong doer accepting responsibility for the fault, so freeing the victim, injured person and vice versa. Both wronged against and wrong doer are then reconciled in a moment of transformation by grace and experience a dying and rising.

Some survivors of unspeakable horror rise to forgive their tormentors. Some parents forgive the failings of their children. Some children forgive their parents. It is a privilege to be present when such an act is performed with generosity. Sometime the greater the crime the greater the forgiveness that follows. We can all instance such moments and be in awe. We can recall the father of a girl killed by an explosion (Gordon Wilson) who said he refused to hate the perpetrators, or the survivors of war atrocities working for reconciliation, or people not casting blame but offering solutions...

Yet it is often the day to day events of our lives that offer us the greatest opportunity for forgiveness and yet it is so often missing. Our judgements get clouded and our hearts closed. We take up stances rather than be prepared to bow, keep silent rather than voice our discontent, be gentle rather than abrupt and dig holes for ourselves from which we cannot escape.

The day to day struggle goes on quietly in the recesses of our spirit. There are moments when in spite of good intention we close the door rather than run the risk of loving or understanding, the risk of rejection sometimes is too great.

Over many years having struggled with greater or lesser events of this type and almost observed my own inadequacies and yet thinking of myself as a 'kindly person' that the challenge of living according to the sayings of Jesus became deeper and deeper.

I therefore write as I have understood not wishing in any way to claim victory or total understanding but offering my poor observations and limited understanding of the words of Jesus when he exhorts us to forgive.

I do not find it easy at all times. I rely on Grace but believe it is incumbent upon me/us to try....

What follows is not a work of scholarship but of the heart.....



## Forgive us our trespasses (debts) as we forgive those who trespass (are in indebted) against us.

What better place to start than the words of the prayer that Jesus gave, the perfect prayer, The 'Our Father'. In it are all the aspects of complete prayer, Adoration, Contrition, Thanksgiving and Supplication and in the middle Jesus pleads with us as He prays himself to the Father to forgive those who sin against Him. But here we also have the crucial element - forgive us as we have forgiven others. These are incredibly demanding and clear words. To the extent that we forgive others we shall be forgiven ourselves. To put it in another form the more forgiveness we can give the more we shall be forgiven ourselves. Hard.. Yes, but essential. Jesus forgave us as he hung on the Cross, he forgave those who were indebted to Him but ran away, deserted Him. He forgave those who crucified Him and abused Him so ferociously because they had no notion of the significance of their actions even if they were in part culpable at least for the excess while being under authority. Yet he asks us to forgive others in this way. He asks us to be merciful as he was.

Many things in our contemporary world are done in our name. In a democracy this is by definition so. Yet many actions and laws do not necessarily concur with our Christian faith. In some cases we can therefore say that they 'know not what they do'. Indeed many wars are so started in the name of a nation but individuals may not concur with the aspirations. To 'forgive' in this situation may be very difficult especially if the actions or laws are against our conscience. We have therefore to look to the Master. He prayed to His Father - Our Father, to forgive 'them' and lead us/them not into temptation. So taking us/them further away from Him.. He forgave and asks us to do the same.

If we forgive the person who seriously hurts us in word, deed or omission we will be forgiven our sins in the same manner. These are truly fantastic words but demanding and encouraging! In contemporary terms one could say... 'do as you would be done by'..... We would be very distressed if we were never forgiven any of our failings by Our loving Father. This is a promise but we are requested to do the same.

Our willingness to do this avoids self-righteousness and prevents the excess of our over zealous but an unloving attitude to those whose opinion, even if flawed, or totally against love, even irresponsible, are nevertheless held strongly. By witnessing to what we believe in its fullness we have more chance of convincing others or at least opening doors to alter perceptions.

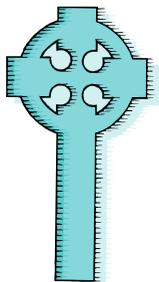
It saddens me greatly to hear the words...'I shall never forgive him/her/ them in any context. How it must truly grieve the all forgiving heart of God to hear those words from those He loves and longs to forgive and those he has already forgiven.

Can we who have received total forgiveness from the Father now lack forgiveness?? These words reverberate in my heart and it is no mistake that we are reminded of them continuously every time we pray the 'Our Father'. How can we forget to forgive? We are reminded to lay down our offering at the altar and go and reconcile ourselves with our brother before we reapproach the altar. We say those forgiving words and then act as if they did not exist. We say forgiving words but yet harbour lack of forgiveness in our hearts. It is for this reason that I include some teachings on the Lords prayer. ( In the Appendix). They each throw light on this call to forgive, each in there own way.

When in prayer, I received these words....

*Jesus...I see that you are following the inspiration of writing on forgiveness. Continue to do so but do not forget that forgiveness is conditional - even when it is given from the bottom of the heart. Man is not capable of total forgiveness but to the extent that the heart is desiring it, so shall the person be forgiven and I will add to perfect the act seeing the souls great struggle. My forgiveness is perfected by passion. My Father forgives any truly contrite soul.*  
28th June 2008. Ferryhill.

These word are deeply consoling as we have the encouragement of knowing that however hard the act of forgiveness is for us we will be aided to do it well if we so wish this. We will also be forgiven in the measure that we have attempted but that the Lords forgiveness brings about a healing of Spirit and he leads us to ever greater perfection of intention.



## 'Much will be forgiven her for she loved much'.... (Luke7:44-50)

This poignant and beautiful sign of forgiveness that Jesus gave and His qualifying reason has often taken me to reflect on how and why we must forgive. As we are bidden to forgive because we have been forgiven we can learn from Jesus how to do this and what surrounds the act of forgiveness and what comes to the fore in the giving of such a gift.

A woman kneels at the feet of Jesus... she clearly is regarded as a sinner, an outcast though we are not told specifically what is her sin, and it does not matter for what we are told is more important. She has the audacity however to touch Jesus. She anoints His head and wipes his feet having washed them with her tears with her hair. She then kisses His feet a mark of her lowliness and humility. The apostles are outraged. Surely they think, Jesus, a prophet would not let her touch him.. he would know how bad she was.

Jesus however does not instantly jump to her defence but teaches the Apostles a lesson about forgiveness. He asks them who is forgiven the more or had his debts removed more, the man who owed 500 or 50 coins. Simon Peter replies correctly that it is the man who owed more who was given more leeway.

Jesus then rebukes them for their lack of hospitality and graciousness. She, a sinner approached him with tenderness and love and because of her love much forgiveness had been given, granted to her, because she had loved much.

This beautiful incident tells us much about the nature of forgiveness. The lady clearly had done many wrong things. Yet she knew this and wept with many tears, tears that not only fell at His feet but into His heart.. She anointed Him using maybe scarce resources and paid Him respect which even the Apostles had not done. She kissed His feet, a most obvious sign of her regret and humility and much love. So she was humble contrite and loving - three aspects of a preconditions for forgiveness all of which she displayed. Jesus recognised this and so forgave her MUCH and told her so!

To the Apostles Jesus then threw out the greatest gauntlet - love much to be forgiven much, the less you love the less you can forgive and the less you will be forgiven.

So Jesus explains this to us that we will be forgiven and indeed many things but that in order for this to be effective we must be loving toward Him and to each other. It was not sufficient for the woman or for us to be simply contrite but to understand that we must be loving to those that we have offended. She loved and was forgiven. If we ask for forgiveness with true sorrow, understanding why we have wronged someone and we wish to love them as a measure of our apology then surely seeing our love they will find it easier to forgive us.

How often apologies are given in a stand off manner each party behind an invisible wall, a nearly formal situation, and yes, it is a starting point but not as generous as that of love. In His linking of love and forgiveness Jesus reminds us that true forgiveness begets and is spurred on by love.

It is still a small practice to 'recompense' someone for wrong doing with a gift - flowers, chocolates, a token, a card. This stems from a desire to love and make amends. Amusingly in these days of corporate error, banks, institutions will often when admitting a fault send the recipient wine, flowers chocolates - while this act may have ulterior motives it belongs in this category of placating the situation.

I recall a situation from childhood when two children at odds with each other, both victims of war, in opposing camps would not speak to each other. The 'stand off' was great. They were forsworn enemies. This caused serious problems for their 'surrogate parents' they hit on an idea a scheme that might work.

In turn they showed first one then the other a bombed city. Both exclaimed that it was their homeland both identifying their pain. To one was given the name of the other ones home, thus Warsaw to the one from Leipzig and vice versa. They both went very quiet. Both were grieving, both touched with sorrow.

In the morning they got a little gift for each other, a small spontaneous act of understanding. There was a wild flower from one a sweet form the other. Slowly a relationship of reconciliation was begun and a deep friendship was born and endured.

True forgiveness comes from the heart. Gods forgiveness requires us loving Him purely because of who He is and so too our human relationships require us to learn to love even our enemies who often come with their prejudices and preconceived ideas. Sometimes people are victims of a situation not of their making. Sometimes there is an almost predictable clash of personality resulting in enmity but all these can be overcome by the recognition of this and the desire for a love that knows no bounds. Grace and strength will be granted.

To forgive is to love much.

Prayer of intercession from Morning prayer ( Divine Office). May our lives today be filled with your compassion; - Give us the Spirit of forgiveness and a generous heart.' (week 3)



## " I do not know Him " (Matt 26: 69-75 and Matt 18: 21- 23.) . Peter is formed for leadership.

The reaction of Peter to being associated with Jesus and his denial and total betrayal of his beloved Master is surely one of the astonishing acts that in human terms require 'forgiveness' in rather large amounts. This man chosen to be the shepherd of the flock who declares his love and follows Jesus finds himself, out of fear, rejecting and denying Jesus and any association with him. With bitter regret he laments his actions, weeps for shame and longing for Him who is love.

Most people have been to that lonely place, in greater or lesser degree' not speaking out to defend a friend, hiding our friendship, wanting acceptance or joining in gossip. How graciously the Lord forgives him so completely that he installs him as the leader of His people. Few of us would rise to such forgiveness, so quickly. We might gradually forgive but not wholeheartedly, or not for a while until someone had 'proved' their loyalty again.

Jesus on the other hand does not act like this. He not only forgives but LOVES him. But he also puts him to more tests making Peter aware of his shortcomings. After the resurrection He asks Peter the degree to which he loves Him. The triple enquiry is made to underline his fitness for such an exalted office as shepherd of the people and also to remind Peter of his responsibilities of love and maybe too of his denial. The office is finally conferred when Peter's love having been purified is made clear by a counter confession. His love of the master is confessed in humility and counter to his denial in weakness. It is further proved by Peter's martyrdom. Forgiveness is granted irrevocably and indeed Jesus the Teacher, asks us to do the same.

Was it not Peter who asked Jesus how many times he had to forgive his brother seven times? (Matt.18: 21-38 ). No, replies Jesus, not seven but seventy times seven.. Remembering that seven is a holy number it in effect means infinitely. He also reminds us that a lack of forgiveness will be held in account and that His Father in Heaven will not forgive unforgiveness, so making it clear that as so much has been forgiven us we too have no option but to forgive others. Indeed this is a key emphasis of the prayer of Jesus himself to His Father.... forgive us ... as we forgive those who trespass against us. He call the unforgiving servant who has been remitted so much by the master 'you wicked servant' as he fails to do likewise in the parable that illustrates the compulsion to forgive.

It is so often the case that while we want to be forgiven we do not extend this forgiveness to others. We wish to be forgiven but if someone offends us that is a different matter. Jesus on the other hand demonstrates a totally different approach!

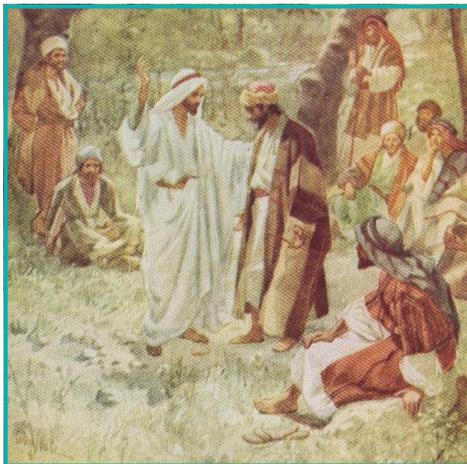
St. Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, the 'Little Flower' learnt this in the Carmel when the irritations and dislikes of one of the Sisters and indeed that Sister obvious dislike of her became transformed by St. Thereses'\* determination not to let this get the better of her charity. Instead of being and feeling hurt or resentful she vowed to 'love' her to such an extent that the sister thought that she especially liked her as she always had a smile for her. Little did she realise Thereses' struggle and that the love was entirely 'Spiritual' She learnt to love what the Lord had fashioned within that sister and not the facade. Often when we do this we find other things about the person that we can admire and sometimes they see the hidden us and friendship can begin to flower or at least enmity is dispelled.

Jesus knew that Peter would betray Him. Throughout his teachings Jesus spoke of forgiveness and mercy and much must have fallen on Peters somewhat deaf ears.. But both the Lords forgiveness and the Spirits illumination led him to understand the real message and to apply the teaching to himself. Blindness and deafness became Sight and Hearing.

In our every days we meet people whom we assess as unfriendly or 'foe' yet they are loved as much as we are. Often we dislike them because they mirror ourselves or some of our attributes, but we are too blind to see this. If we as Jesus did and so did many Saints, that is pray for our enemies, our sight would improves and they would also become more open to us. Instead of an attitude of 'I don't want to know' you /we can start to say: 'I am getting to know' you or 'I want to be more loving towards you' and then a transformation can take place.

To know the Lord is to know how to forgive and to know how He loves and to love Him back and those that he presents to us.

\*Novena on the Spirituality of St. Therese. Fr. Robert Colasert. O. Carm.



## Forgive each other as soon as a quarrel begins.... St. Paul to the Colossians 3: 12-17.

Every act of unforgiveness starts at the point of a break in a relationship, an act of one person against the other, small or deadly, a refusal to step down or withdraw from a quarrel. Words spoken in anger become weapons of dissent, hurt and disagreement. Clearly some acts are one sided - an unprovoked attack on a bystander for example of which we now seem to have so many in a culture that elevates a hidden violence of 'self' as being predominant. Sometimes, even in this, words precede the action or are somehow in the experience of the person, a throw back to the past. But if we set aside this kind of reaction which requires a forgiveness that challenges us to the core - though there are witnesses to this also ( the parents of some of the young people and adults killed on our streets) we are also called to speak justly. When we are being attacked, judged or when conversation is being adversarial and contentious our spiritual antennae should be telling us that this could lead to serious dispute or injury of one or both people involved, even as bystanders we should be looking for middle ground, a point of agreement and not disagreement or fuel the fires by taking a stand in favour of one person or the other. Sometimes we should be silent as the conversation is outside our situation and any comment could make matters worse.

Equally if someone is defenceless we may be called to protect them but always peacefully and gently. Any situation where the conversation has turned 'nasty' and an exchange has become an attack should make us withdraw and conclude because then we become unresponsive to peace.

One word leads to another. Words spoken in anger are sometimes difficult to retract and can linger in the heart of the other person. Speaking the truth in love is characterised by a peaceful predisposition regardless of the nature of the words certainly of correction - though, even here we can learn from the Saints who preferred honey to vinegar when addressing someone in need of correction. St Therese often dealt with novices like this and St. Francis de Sales too preferred this approach with his famous comment about honey and vinegar.. 'a spoonful of honey is better than a barrelful of vinegar.'  
(St. Francis de Sales.. Introduction to the Devout life)

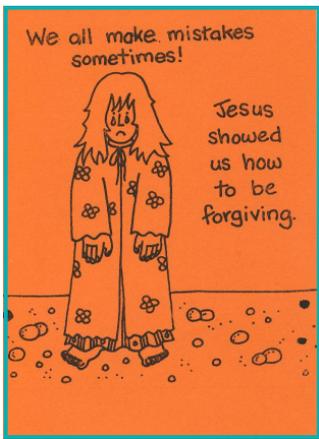
Every situation produces its different effects and challenges us to be a witness ( a martyr) to peace and harmony. We are encouraged to look at self before we pass judgement on the other but we too are not required to let anybody unjustly attack us. Whether it is in self defence or in a violent attack we are entitled to question the right of someone to do this if it is unprovoked or we are innocent. Indeed during the trial of Jesus (John 18: 19-23) he asked by what right he was being questioned. But the key here is defence and always with peace and a desire to conclude.

It is in the family that this is perhaps the most practical tool of peace. The everyday bustle and haste often leads persons brushing ego with ego, rights and frustrations, squabbles over trivia emerge and can take on a destructive force which the contents cannot really justify. How many times do quarrels which are in themselves everyday develop into major issues with family members not speaking to one another sometimes for years.. Husbands and wives say rash things in the heat of the moment which they later regret, sometimes when it is too late. Everybody has at some time had that -' oh I wish I had not said that,' moment! Here the encouragement to never let the sun set on our anger applies beautifully and brings together all aspects of forgiveness.

If only we could understand what a lack of forgiveness does to both ourselves and to others we would try to prevent any differences between us quickly, never allowing them to fester and become open wounds. Further we would forgive' as soon as'..... trying to understand the everyday misdemeanours that we ourselves inflict we would gladly reduce the 'wrong done' to us by others and placate and give charity to others.

We all have different temperaments some more placid than others but all of us at some point make mistakes. We judge others motives and intentions and get them wrong. If we stand back at the outset we can prevent these interfering with the everyday irritations which usually sort themselves out if we let them pass with a forgiving spirit.

These moments have to come from the heart and soul. Festering disputes often covered by externalities of form can destroy a small community something that religious communities often witness a bitterness covered by a pretence at true forgiveness and understanding. This too has to be brought to the fore. Forgiveness has to be matched by honesty and integrity. A gentle word of reproach can open the door to true understanding when both parties wish to live a life of charity.



## Judas and the 'other' prodigal son....

It may seem strange to counterbalance Judas, a child of The Father, the man who betrayed the Son of God and who had been chosen especially as one of the Apostles sitting at His table often and at the Last Supper with the prodigal son of the father in the parable of the same name! It is often taken not a parable but a true story as its impact has been considerable. Yet it was a learning tool that Jesus employed to exemplify forgiveness in all its aspect and the role of the 'offender' and the 'offended.'

If we unravel the two situations one fact, and one illustrative feature can almost make us think that Judas was not listening to what Jesus was saying for if he had done so would he not have taken another path. Would he not, in spite of his infamous betrayal and rejection of his Master, still come for forgiveness? Where was he I wonder when Jesus preached this parable?

Just as Jesus forewarned Peter of his denial.. did He not forewarn Judas too of his? It is worth reflecting on this for we too do not always take on board the parable in its entirety and learn from it. Stories, parables are excellent teaching tools and Jesus had no problem using them.

Judas was a favoured son.. Jesus must have seen the good potential in him. He was with the others most of the time. Yet we have an insight into his struggles throughout. Did he not chide Jesus for letting the woman spill wonderful oil over Jesus in an act of love, saying that it was a waste and that the money would have been best spent on the poor! (John 12: 1-7 ) Did he not, unable to take the reproach thereafter seek to betray Jesus.. ( Matt 26: Vs.14). Judas seems to be unable to love and unable to be both forgiven and to forgive himself. He was a man who looked for mistakes in others, errors in judgement, falls from grace. He found it difficult to have an open heart and therefore could not accept the open-hearted love of His Master. The more he rejected this love the more he felt alienated himself and did not believe in living for others but for himself. So challenged did he feel by 'Purity' that he had to destroy it and thereby sealed his own fate. Had he betrayed and sought forgiveness he would have saved himself quite literally. He would not have destroyed himself spiritually which then was reflected in his bodily death, his imperative to destroy completed in himself. I wonder if indeed this was the sin against the Holy Spirit that Jesus said would not be forgiven. To deny the possibility of forgiveness is to deny God this power. It is a blasphemy and therefore cannot be forgiven and a choice for unforgiveness. The will turns against the Creator so completely and it suffers the consequences.

Now we have the opposite parable from Jesus himself....

The son of a wealthy father wants more than his father's love and kindness. He wants pleasure, self-seeking and self-promotion. In Hebrew law to take the inheritance before the death of the father is a grievous offence. It is to anticipate and claim rights. He not only takes it, and the father in his love grants even this, but squanders it and lives licentiously and dishonours his father further. But this 'son of the father' partly through self-pity and then through need and a degree of humility returns to the father and begs for forgiveness. He does not even ask for a restoration of his position but simply to be accepted back however lowly his rank would be.

Oh how eagerly the father takes him back and bestows on him every honour. How the broken-hearted father must have wept for his son and hoped and prayed and awaited this moment. He did not hesitate to forgive him or reproached him in any way. He delighted in his return.

The picture is graphic. Unlike Judas he was able to accept his error and seek forgiveness. His sin of taking his inheritance would have been seen as dire. An offence not worthy of forgiveness and those listening would have been aware of this. And yet Jesus shows how the father loved him, welcomed him and forgave.

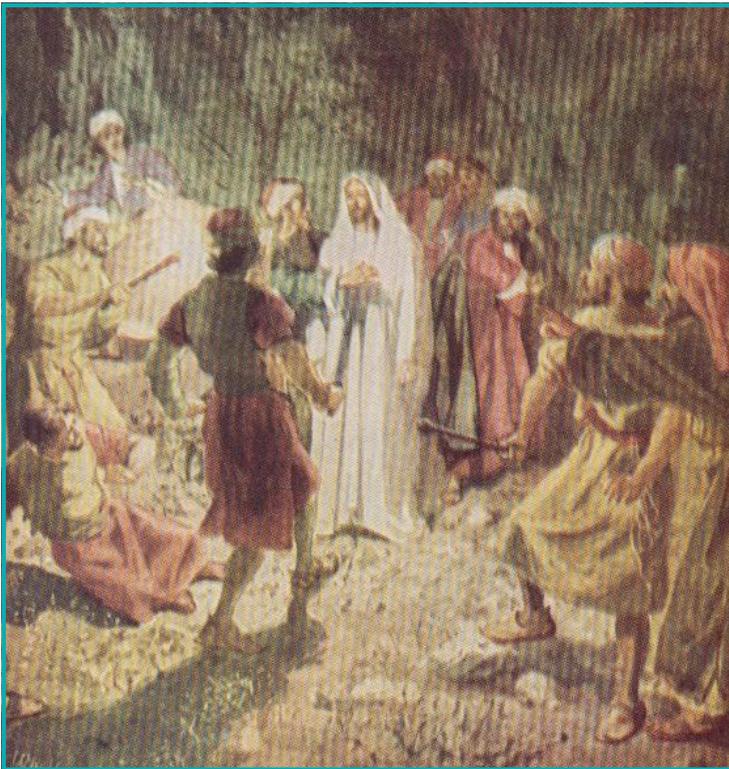
The third figure in this story, the 'other' brother also deserves a mention for in many ways he symbolises many of us at one time or another. Feeling slighted and having a kind of righteousness and a sense of injustice - he had been a 'good boy/son' done all the right things after all and now, his brother was being rewarded for his badness, so resentment built into his spirit! Here we see another aspect of forgiveness. This son could not accept the forgiveness and generosity of the father. Like some of us he might have felt the smugness at his seeming goodness and faithfulness but when the crunch came his heart was not full enough of love but anger and resentment. He was not willing to take the lead from the father and be open and forgiving. The father who loved him no less reminded him of this. He had not betrayed the father and had his reward in the father's secure love... His fault was not being able to accept the equality of the father's love.

It is a failing of many of us not to be able to forgive even 'second hand' he had not done anything wrong and why, was his father rewarding wrong doing? But the forgiveness of the father was his right but the son could not take it. Somehow he felt cheated.

This comes to the fore in our lives to. Phrases such as .. well they may forgive but I can't... will not, come to mind. Jesus reminds us that the 'first shall be last and the last first'. He goes after the lost sheep and reminds us that there is more joy in heaven over the one who <sup>18</sup>was lost and is now found, joy over the sinner who returns...

The message is clear. the Mercy of God and the Justice of God cannot and must not be equated with the feelings and judgements of man. As human beings we struggle to be generous in our forgiveness, leaving God to judge. The Merciful Father welcomes us back if we seek his welcome. We must stand back and rejoice at such mercy and dispel that which would prohibit it. Love is always other centred.

" IF you oh Lord should mark our guilt  
Lord who would survive?  
But with you is found forgiveness  
For this we revere you. "  
Psalm 129 (130).



## The Dying threesome..... Crucified Redeemer and two villains.....

Forgiveness, man made, often takes time. We not only delay but let go of our dislikes, prejudices, hurts often slowly.

We expect others to come to us rather than we reach out to them. But throughout Christianity there have been examples of forgiveness which is spontaneous and truly remarkable in its generosity. One crucial element however is that the one at fault or sinning recognises this. Yet, incredible forgiveness when this is missing does happen and love is victorious. The martyrs often forgave their executioners. St. Thomas More comes to mind here. There is of course the wonderful statement of the first Martyr St. Stephen whose words are a perfect example to us... As he was being stoned he said aloud ' Lord do not hold this sin against them' and with these words he fell asleep.' (Acts.7:54-59 ) But no less extreme are the act of forgiveness when this is sought.

Two such examples come to from Jesus's life and work - not parables, illustrative stories indicating the mind and will of God, but the actions real and words spoken which indicated the earnest and palpable forgiveness of the Son.

The woman taken in Adultery- caught in the act so to speak of unfaithfulness had much to fear from the disclosure of her sin. Apart from public humiliation there was also public judgement leading to stoning and a certain death.

Jesus deals with her in a very particular way which shows his gentleness but also his condemnation of the hypocritical judgement of others, perhaps more interested in the 'law', than in truth, or condemnation rather than correction.

First, Jesus did not look at her. A woman already humiliated and afraid - He does not add to her shame. Secondly He continues to seemingly ignore her - he 'writes' in the sand.

Thirdly He addresses the 'condemners' by pointing out their sins, fault and failings.

Then - when they have all left because clearly non were sinless or faultless - He then, and only then speaks directly to the woman. The next exchange is also interesting for Jesus seems to be saying that if they have nor condemned her neither will He. But here this must not be interpreted as 'letting her off'- he will not condemn her to 'death' as the others tried in/by - Judaic justice. He could have joined in or brought her to justice solo. He does not stone her, stops the others, but he does exhort her to sin no more. He forgives and releases her.

Compassion, Justice and Forgiveness all are beautifully made manifest. How grateful the woman must have felt. We do not know if this was Mary Magdalene ( whose feast it is as I write) or not. What we do know, is that her load was lifted.

There are many instances of forgiveness in Jesus's life but perhaps non so dramatic and significant as of the thief on the cross.

Three men hang dying on Crosses. Two men are convicted of crime, One Man Hangs Innocent of any crime and dies so that the other two may be saved. His agony incorporating their sin, their rejection of good. But grace, the blessing of spiritual sight is given and the two men make their final choices. One rejects Jesus and grace and dies cursing the Redeemer who hangs beside him. The other makes a wonderful 'confession.'.... I am guilty - I deserve what is happening but he Jesus is not guilty - he begs from Him a moment of remembrance in Jesus's Kingdom. Indeed a moment of faith from a dying man! We do not know how much he knew about Jesus, if anything. Maybe it was an inspired moment. Maybe he secretly followed him but the statement came from belief and hope.

Oh how wonderfully he was rewarded. In one sentences he was both forgiven but also redeemed, purified and enveloped in Mercy. Before he died he was guaranteed a place in Heaven with the Redeemer. Redemption granted Paradise for his remorse was complete. Pure contrition was blessed.

'This day you will be with Me in Paradise' (Luke 23 :43.,)

The difference between the two men was made manifest but the forgiveness at the last minute reveals the truth of Gods' forgiveness and not the puny efforts of man. Unlike the felt injustice of the son in the parable that stayed at home the father forgives the prodigal and takes him home.

Death- bed confessions do indeed happen and it may appear to us as unjust that all can be so 'bad' before but all can be forgiven in an instant. Clearly it is the Father who looks with mercy on the sinner who repents and forgives. It seems unjust to those who have striven for a life which is generally good. But only the Father can forgive totally. Yes there are various forms of contrition and degrees of same but these are not for us to discern and maybe to save the lost the Father is more generous than we are, in His assessment. Even fear may play a part but again how often does guilt bring us to remorse - a start toward real contrition. Sometimes a word unspoken until a dying moment such as ..'I love you', or 'forgive me' can bring healing to someone , friend or family. It can sustain through the torments of grief and mourning. Is it so surprising therefore that the Father will accept a ' I am Sorry' and forgive all for He longs for our love and closeness and His capacities are INFINITE for forgiveness.

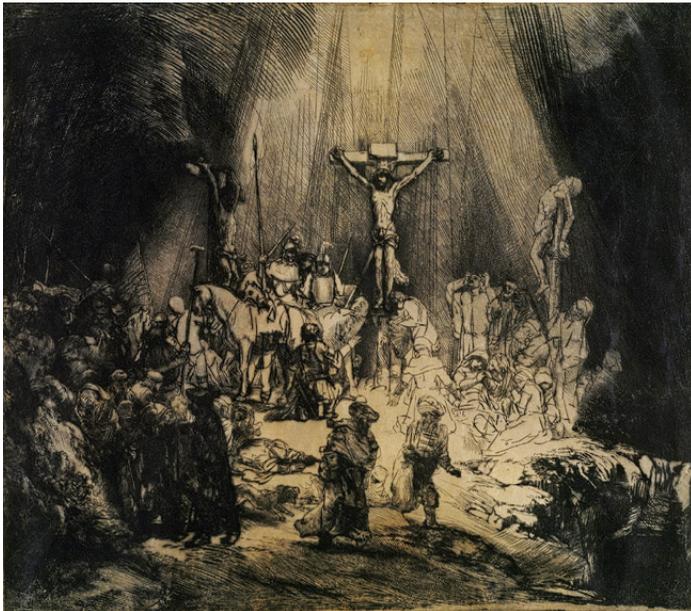
There is no doubt that Jesus associated with sinners, prostitutes, tax collectors, and that His heart yearned to forgive and lead the sinner to His embrace. Another public defaulter, for indeed we do not know though it is likely, that Matthew, the tax collector defrauded people or at least was guilty of some form of cheating or usury. Again his sin was public- there was no way it could be hidden. Hated by the Jews he was nevertheless forgiven and called. Not only was he chosen as one of the Apostles but was instrumental in giving us the Gospel. We see how Jesus called him so powerfully. He gave him a chance to respond. Matthew felt the forgiveness and he made restitution and joined and followed Jesus.

Jesus forgave public sins very openly going against the consensus and judgements of those who knew of them. Some of the greatest acts, of this kind were brought to nothing through the remorse or contrition of the sinner. Hypocrisy and false judgement however was dealt with more severely by Jesus.. The so called righteous indignation of the Pharisees and Sadducees was turned upside down by the manner that Jesus dealt with both them and the transgressor.

Today where news travels fast, distortions and sensationalism even faster it is wise to remember the actions and love Jesus showed. Even though he undoubtedly read the hearts of those around him he still allowed the transgressors their say. He challenged them to repent, amend their ways and then forgave them when they responded. To an extent they were paying the price for their errors and sins by public humiliation and rejection and he too was in that position and though he was innocent and dare I say, maybe therefore he had a double sympathy for people in this position. Not so the self righteous who in order to deflect from their sin heaped even greater condemnation on others.

It cannot be better summarised than it is in St. Pauls Epistle to the Ephesians 4: 29-32.....' forgive one another as God has forgiven you in Christ.'

(It may be worth pondering too what the extent 'the ill' behaviour may be seen differently by the Father too?)



Rembrandt. ~~the~~ Three Crosses

## The Sacrament of Forgiveness... confession is good for the soul.....

It is a matter of certainty that we all have things in our lives that require forgiveness from somebody somewhere. It may be a harsh word or scandalous defamation. It may be a hurtful action or a serious crime. There are things that we should have done and never did, things that we need to put right that we did not get round to. There are untruths and lies, cover ups and disclaimers. In essence most of our everyday lives bring forth situations that bring out our faults and failings that impinge on the lives of others and that require forgiveness. This is true of the ordinary and the extraordinary, the small interpersonal, familial, community or national levels. Reconciling nations and people in these times of conflict and war is surely an essential path that Christians must tread.

Yet how infrequently we use those little words 'I am so sorry'. Most often we hope that all is forgotten and forgiven without the necessity for those little words of true apology and an inherent plea for forgiveness.

We therefore carry within us great burdens. It is very difficult to be open with anyone if somewhere in our heart we harbour a need for forgiveness or a need for apology. The light becomes dimmed if we cannot openly face someone we have wronged or we fear to face somebody who had hurt us!

The situations are so many in everyday life that it is easier to bypass these flaws and dismiss them. We often confuse guilt and shame which may be justified, with a need to forgive and be forgiven. The former may not be an expression of genuine feeling but rather a fear of consequences. Indeed fear and guilt can be closely allied. Fearing judgement, condemnation, may not be genuine regret or remorse and can delay the desire to make peace.

It is one of the principles of many therapeutic groups that owning ones own feelings and accepting a fault or affliction is crucial to dealing with it or to use contemporary language 'moving on, or forward. Thus Alcoholics have to define themselves as such as well as addicts of various types.

Reading through a charity magazine I came across an article on 'healing wounds' in which the writer states that exploration or identification of feelings is the first step to self healing. She identifies five stages of this process, exploration, expression, comfort, and a compensation perspective. While aimed at emotional management there are useful tools here in examination of conscience. The first and last are perhaps the most crucial. If we do not accept responsibility we become turgid and unable to resolve our feelings and move forward.

Put into a spiritual context unless we own our sin, faults, failings and true guilt (sorrow) we cannot respond to them and decide in which way we can correct them and leave them behind and try to<sup>23</sup> avoid these misdemeanours or major sins in the future. Both elements are essential.

It is interesting that the writer then states that forgiveness is the icing on the cake of emotional healing. " If it can be achieved is wonderful for you and the person concerned" she states. The 'If' here is significant as she believes that it is difficult but rewarding!

Ah.. if only these word were translated into the lives of all. For any Christian forgiveness is the path to holiness and justice. Perfect forgiveness belongs to God but we are called to follow Jesus who led by His example and died to exemplify it so that we could live freely. " Forgive them for they no not what they do" He also told us to forgive each other and taught us how to do it but... like the Perfect Teacher that He was He realised that in order to be able to forgive we must be open to grace and an acceptance of ourselves as we are so that we can change and become mirrors of Himself and not static images of ourselves of our own making view or inclination.

In a chance glimpse of a film on television one of the characters made this remark to her angry husband..." Yes, God loves you as you are but.. He loves you enough not to keep you that way."

In order to facilitate this process he called 'those' who would be able to reconcile us with ourselves, discover our faults and sins and then by confessing ( recognising) these to surrender these to the power of Grace and to the Father, Son and Spirit. The Father not only forgives but forgets our sins. The power and the freedom to do likewise is the gift of Love Himself, making this possible and lies at the heart of the giving of the keys.... By the authority of the Body of Christ, the Church, this has been granted to priests and in so far as we share in that priesthood to all of us. But it is an awesome gift that in the process of the Sacrament something Sacred and Holy takes place. By the power vested in him a priest acts as intermediary between God and Man and forgives that which can be forgiven " Whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven ,whose sins you shall retain they are retained"

We become co-operators in Grace. We come 'cap- in- hand', we recognise our faults and sins and we are forgiven, and we are forgiven so that that we can then leave them behind and not lurch towards them like lemmings running over a cliff of self-destruction. Having been forgiven we too can forgive others and reconcile with both God and Man. The beauty of the confessional is not in the declaration of sin but in its forgiveness, in the contrition of the person and in the alteration of life- ' a life changing' takes place. We talk of life changing events and yet nothing can compare with the freedom that this Sacrament gives the person. He/She is 'reborn' each time into a new life. The strength of the grace can indeed be life changing if of course we let it be....

Forgiveness is not just the icing on the cake but a real sign of the Kingdom to come and given freely.

Yes it often requires our honesty and integrity.

Yes, it is often painful as we do not like to own our mistakes and errors.

Yes, it requires a humbling of ourselves before God and each other but what phenomenal benefits it brings!

Gael Linokenfield spoke of the healing of wounds but deeper is the healing of spiritual wounds which separate us not only from each other but God himself. It also frees us from blaming others which is so much part of the culture in which we live.

What an honour the Father bestowed on Man that we have the ability to forgive each other. What special gift he also bestowed on us through His Son to call from among us men who can act in the place of His Son and forgive and forget our serious errors and sins, faults, failings....

This exchange, these grace filled moments, when the burden of our transgressions is forgiven and remorse leads to freedom peace and love cannot be surpassed in its effects on the person. The freedom to start again, be healed and cleansed, to grow in love and holiness surely is one of the great mercies of God. The kindness which the Father enables through this Sacrament should fill us with gratitude and joy. Even on a humanist level it is often said that confession is good for the soul, a getting it off ones chest, a dumping of the things that cause us and others pain. But to reduce Sacramental Confession to this level, however superficially efficacious it is, is to forget the essential element of Jesus' statement... ..

" Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven , and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 16:17-20.)

Powerful words indeed of major significance for through the instrumentality of a chosen vessel, the priest, our sins, faults are forgiven and forgotten ( where there is true repentance)

This purification of the soul gives us an opportunity to start afresh and be lightened of the burdens of both error and guilt.

This phenomenal gift, this grace allows us not to be bound by our failings and faults and to be always able to receive grace and to be open to the Spirit.

In these days of rejection of personal error of any kind, personal or public it is important to remember the words of the Master that He did not expect us to be held captive by our error but having owned the fault/sin to accept forgiveness also and grace and to walk free.

Awareness of our weakness far from being a debasement is a liberation and constructive and not destructive of person. It is to be esteemed by God as worthy of forgiveness if we accept that we are flawed individuals. It is to realise that He loves us and will not reject us if we repent and accept His forgiveness. He paid the price of that forgiveness, he redeemed us- brought us freedom by the power of His sacrifice on the Cross. He not only made a sacrificial self offering for us or a few but for all.<sup>25</sup> This wow factor cannot be expressed adequately.

In Confession He reminds us that He has paid the price. WE are freed from sin, bought back by the Blood that he spilt and that all we have to do is refrain form sin or repent and we are forgiven. It seems incredible that today people reject this gift when they have to do so little to benefit from it.

### A Prayer of Forgiveness...

For all that we should have thought and have not thought,  
For all that we should have said and have not said  
For all we should have done and have not done,  
We ask forgiveness, Lord  
For all that we should not have thought but have thought,  
For all that we should have said but have not have said,  
For all that we should have done but have not done,  
We ask forgiveness, Lord.

(A Muslim prayer.)



## Whose Sins you Shall Retain....??

One problem exist for many. What did Jesus mean when he spoke of retained sins, sins that cannot be forgiven. These sins were not to be forgiven by the instrumentality of the priest alone. Would they be forgiven by the mercy of God Himself?

Equally Jesus gave us a clue in the phrase that sin against The Holy Spirit can never be forgiven, so in that sense are retained. These are indeed terrifying words and surely pertain to grave matter.

Certainly there are/were sins considered so grave that they had to be referred to a Bishop ( by the penitent) and would not be forgiven out of hand by the confessor.

Certainly too those sins that require restitution also require that this is done before the fullness of absolution is attained.

The catechism speaks of blasphemy as the sin against the Holy Spirit. What would be a more specific rejection of God than to openly discount His presence or insult Him. It would be to reject Truth and essentially if we reject this we reject the whole essence of the Godhead. I am not speaking here of the imperfections or distortions or lies that come from our weakness, but of the total rejection of all that pertains to God.

However we must also consider here those things that condemn us and our neighbour because of calumny or detraction, lies under oath, sins against children, abuse that the Lord condemns so strongly and the interference with life itself.

The Spirit of God 'hovered over the deep'. He is the safe keeper of life and the blatant and determined attempt to prove, however disguised as 'science' that God does not exist, or that man is the instigator of all life and can determine the future shape of it is essentially a sin against the Holy Spirit. Man has been gifted with the faculty of thought and has been granted the right to explore and find solutions to problems, gain knowledge and explore the universe. There is no contradiction between this and belief... but a determined attempt to contradict the laws of nature and the Makers intention, eugenics, the rejection of the imperfect, the decisions for a choice in sexual identity, selection of gender, cloning and manipulation of genetic makeup assume rights that we do not have. This is a serious departure from the desire to aid man in the understanding of nature and to give Glory to God for all he has made.

An impenitent and chosen desire to do this must therefore be a sin against the Holy Spirit. A simple definition of Blasphemy is .. 'to speak disrespectfully of God or sacred things' ( Collins Dictionary) Surely we would have more than disrespect here!

Catechism of the Catholic church....2000..

"Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven but the *blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven*"

There is no limit to the mercy of God, but anyone who deliberately refuses to accept His mercy by repenting, rejects the forgiveness of his sins and the salvation offered by the Holy Spirit. Such hardness of heart can lead to final impenitence and eternal loss." 1845.



*Forgive our sins as we forgive  
you taught us Lord to pray,  
but you alone can grant us grace  
to live the words we say.*

*How can your pardon reach and bless,  
the unforgiving heart,  
that broods on wrong and will not let  
old bitterness depart.*

*In blazing light your Cross revealed  
the truth we dimly know:  
what trivial debts are owed to us,  
how great our debt to you!*

*Lord, cleanse the depths within our souls  
and bid resentment cease.  
Then, bound to all in bonds of love,  
our lives will spread your peace.*

Rosamond Herklots. Hymn 182. Celebration Hymnal for Everyone. McCrimmons.



## Our Lady Mary as Model of Forgiveness. Our Inspiration...

As I was concluding the previous section a thought stuck me referring to Our Lady, the Spouse of the Holy Spirit. How could I forget to make a reference to Our Lady as an inspired forgiver. Indeed it was a serious omission for her forgiveness was continuous and transparent.

At a symposium on the writing of St. John Duns Scotus and the Immaculate ( Durham University Sept 2008.) a phrase struck me. She is the spouse of the Holy Spirit. She is the human perfect vessel through which the Son of God had to pass in order to bring about Redemption. She more than any other human being was the vessel of truth. She bore Truth in her womb. She was pure and in this integrity she served. There were so many things that must have tortured her motherly heart as her Son was rejected, humiliated, mocked and abused for goodness and abundant generosity and finally put to death by those he loved and served. This in any part is enough sorrow for any mother but she became instead a model of forgiveness, an icon and example of the necessity of forgiveness for one that is human.

I have often pondered on the almost impossible task she had to accomplish in accompanying her beloved son Jesus to Calvary, then standing by St John with the other women at the foot of the Cross beholding her sons brutalised body, her heart split apart. Where were the others , the Apostles? Where was the throng of healed, forgiven , restored? Where was the throng wild with delight that welcomed Him with palms? -

He the pure lamb, innocent, her pure little lamb whom she cradled in her arms was now subject to the torturers arms.  
How could she endure all this?

Anyone who has endured, experienced the death of a child ( of any age) will know something of a mothers pain.. indeed a fathers too. The surrendering of a child of ones own can sometimes take years to come to terms with. But a child taken by violence, a needless death in human terms seems beyond forgiveness. Extraordinary heroism is required and can and does happen. It is rare however to not only witness but experience the execution blow by blow. War can sometimes bring this about but then often leads to the death of a the parent too ... a severe mercy. (a term coined by Van Auken in the book of the same name). This incredible pain is also well described in the book 'The Shack'... Wm Paul Young, as 'The Great Sadness' and indeed a way forward with grace. But in this instance she Mary the mother of the Son had to continue living and moreover be an example to the followers of The Way. How could she forgive not only those who brutalised her son but also those who were the followers and yet abandoned Him in the hour of His greatest need.

I believe that this can only be understood in the context of the incredible love that the Mother and Son had for each other and the mystery of the conjoining of their hearts.

Mary too had a journey to undertake, to trust to the improbable and seemingly impossible a birth by the action of the Holy Spirit. Her 'Yes' was not just a surrender but an explosion of interior grace an overwhelming leap into the dark an a 'yes' to the Fathers will. This journey continued throughout her life and deepened with every twist and turn of her and Jesus' life.

How Simeons' words must have touched and echoed in her life... 'a sword of grief will pierce your heart'. Her joy too lingered as a balm as her son grew to manhood and participated in village life- but always that sword hung ready to pierce that pure heart.

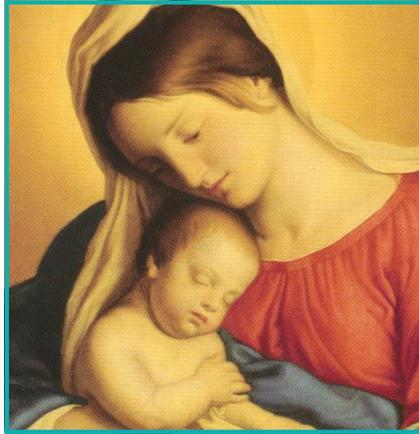
After the marriage feast in Cana and the Sons obedience to his mother request she walked by Him but always at a distance always looking for him, looking out for him. Had she not lost Him before in the temple when he reminded her that he had to be about His Fathers business? They walked together but apart, never truly separated for their love held them as one and in that they were bound to the Fathers will.

As they darted between an angry crowd with the shouts of crucify Him her heart truly bled as truly as her Sons heart bled for us. At times he must have disappeared from view. What a dance these two hearts must have had on that journey each hoping to catch a glimpse of each other and then finally the glance of perfect understanding and exquisite agony and love. Did they ever lose that moment? As her Son emptied himself so totally for all on that journey, so too the Mother as a human being had to empty herself of all desire to 'save' her Son and to take to her heart his messianic, His saving role for all mankind. One can only guess at the torture that she experienced at the foot of the Cross.

Even here the Son did not abandon her but gave her not only to John, so validating her role (widows had little function in Jewish tradition and without a son less so) but he gave her to us as a mother. This action not only gave us a heavenly mother but also a model of all that can be pure in Man. Her heart was so full of love and understanding that she was able to withstand the wrench and forgive with the passion that the Son had expressed on the Cross.

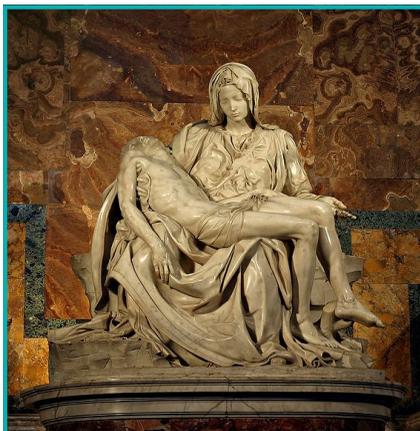
With compassion she gathered the forlorn Apostles and upheld them. She became part of the Mystery of the Redemption. Did he not appear first to her even before Mary Magdalene in the garden? We are not told but....?

Mary's word are not recorded after the death of Jesus, his rising and return to the Father, but her presence among them is.! Maybe there was no need to record her word which would have echoed her Sons so completely.



She stands as our Mother - She endured the unendurable and like her Son and the Father with the Holy Spirit forgave and can teach us to forgive if we but ask her. Does she not always point to her Son? Does He not always point to His mother? Her tender heart is a guide for us. To have the courage to stand beside the broken and pained and yet love, to be broken and yet continue to love and forgive for the sake of her Son whom she knew endured and suffered grievously. To be prepared to die for and of love for the sake of the kingdom... as he did and know that she is at our side. If we need a model of forgiveness we need only to look at Mary and Jesus the love of the Father and the grace of the abiding Spirit.

*Love is stronger than hatred and to forgive is to practice perfect love.*



## Appendix.

### A paraphrase of the Our Father taken from 'Praying with Clare and Francis..... ( extract)

Forgive us our sins  
through your mercy beyond words,  
through the power of the passion  
of your beloved Son,  
through the merits of the Virgin Mary  
and of all your chosen ones.  
*As we forgive*

*Those who sin against us*  
And that we ourselves  
cannot fully forgive,  
make us love our enemies,  
truly for your sake;  
teach us how to pray sincerely  
to You on their behalf,  
and not to render harm for harm

### Commentary on the Our Father ( extract ) taken from the writings of Abbe N Grou.. How to pray...

#### **Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.**

The Gospel on more than one occasion speaks of our sins as debts we contract to the justice of God, and His pardon as the remission of the debt. For this reason to make matters more clear and intelligible, instead of the words of Christ the following have been substituted, which have the same meaning: *Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us.*

This conditional petition is very noteworthy. Nothing shows us more emphatically how dear to God's heart is the forgiveness of injuries. He here makes the solemn promise to forgive us the sins we have committed against Him, if we on the other side forgive our neighbour any injury he may have done us. And at the same time he declares that we must expect no pardon from Him if we are unforgiving to others. To put us, as it were under the necessity of forgiving, he promises to do so.

*Forgive us*, we say to Him, *As we forgive*; that is evidently:

*Forgive us if we forgive, and do not forgive us if we refuse to forgive.*

The revengeful Christian is here judged by his own lips; or else, as long as he keeps in his heart any desire for revenge, he must desist from saying the Lords prayer. A sad alternative indeed, however little be his faith! Jesus Christ foresaw how hard it would be to our pride and self-love to forgive injuries, and on how many pretexts we should seek to be dispensed from so doing; and to cut short all our reasoning's, to silence us, and to overcome our pride and self-love, He prompts us by our highest interest: he makes forgiveness of injuries the essential condition of the far more important pardon that we need, and each day beg of God to grant us.

Moreover, of all the petitions of which this prayer is composed, it is the **ONLY** ( my emphasis) one which Our Lord repeats and on which he insists adding elsewhere these words:

*For if we forgive men their offences, your<sup>32</sup> heavenly Father will forgive you also. But if you do not forgive them, your heavenly Father will not forgive you your offences.*  
( *Matth. 5 14-15.*)

Teaching on the Our Father received on the 1st September 1998, St Mary Magdalene's Church Brockley London. (extract)

During Adoration of the Most Blessed Host.

Jesus.... *My dear Halina..... Can you not see what is happening? War is almost upon you. War of the flesh and war of the Spirit. the first war can lead to the killing of many - but, oh My People, the second will cost you your souls. Wake up - arise, fight for me - do not insult me Me with gabble - with words said with no love, no meaning. have I not instructed you well?*

*You did well not to join in (this kind of prayer) and suffer for me.*

*When I lifted up My Spirit to the Father in Prayer, We were one - Our Father - My Father- your Father - He made us, , we belong to Him.*

*I was conceived by the Holy Spirit - sent by My father-*

*I have taught you the Perfect Prayer.*

*My people , My people, why do you grieve Me?*

*Why do you not say these words in awe of the majesty of My Father in Heaven.*

***Our Father...***

Jesus....*Say it with me... Our Father (Stop). breather it into your spirit - let that knowledge and truth envelop - breather it in- the Holy Spirit will overshadow, you will hide under His wings....*

*Our Father...*

There then was, given phrase by phrase a teaching on all the prayer. and then....

**Forgive us our trespasses...**

H.. Lord, forgive us- Forgive - Forgive us lord, we are such poor creatures - we fail.. we fail.

Jesus... *Halina pray intently for Fr. X. he does not have love- offer your love of me To Me. Let me do with you what I will.*

*Say Yes, now Halina.*

*Stop at this moment..*

( I was distressed at this priests speed of prayer especially as the Sorrowful Mysteries were said at such speed.)

Jesus asked me to prostrate myself on the floor for Him for two Mysteries)

H... Jesus I cannot do less than you bid- help me to do more for your Holy Names sake.

## As we forgive those who trespass against us....

H... Lord Jesus, what is there to forgive?- we are all sinners!

Jesus....*Forgiveness is the emptying out of self-*

*Give yourself to others.*

*Hold on to nothing save the Cross.*

*Cross yourself with me.*

*You must not bear grudges, or give false witness or sin against each other by with holding love.*

*Love one another as I have loved you.*

*Total love leads to total forgiveness.*

*Who are you not to forgive, when I forgive so much more than anyone can dream of - the sins of man fill oceans and oceans - yet see- Look at the Cross - See I forgive.*

*My love is boundless - beg for the gift of Forgiveness and*

*Purity of heart. Selflessness.*

At the end of all the teachings the Lord concluded with these words.....

Jesus...*I protect MY people. My Angels defend your honour. They surround you*

*night and day. The Saints intercede for you. My Mother is your protector always.*

*She will banish Lucifer for ever. It is My will. Amen.*

*Ponder these things.*

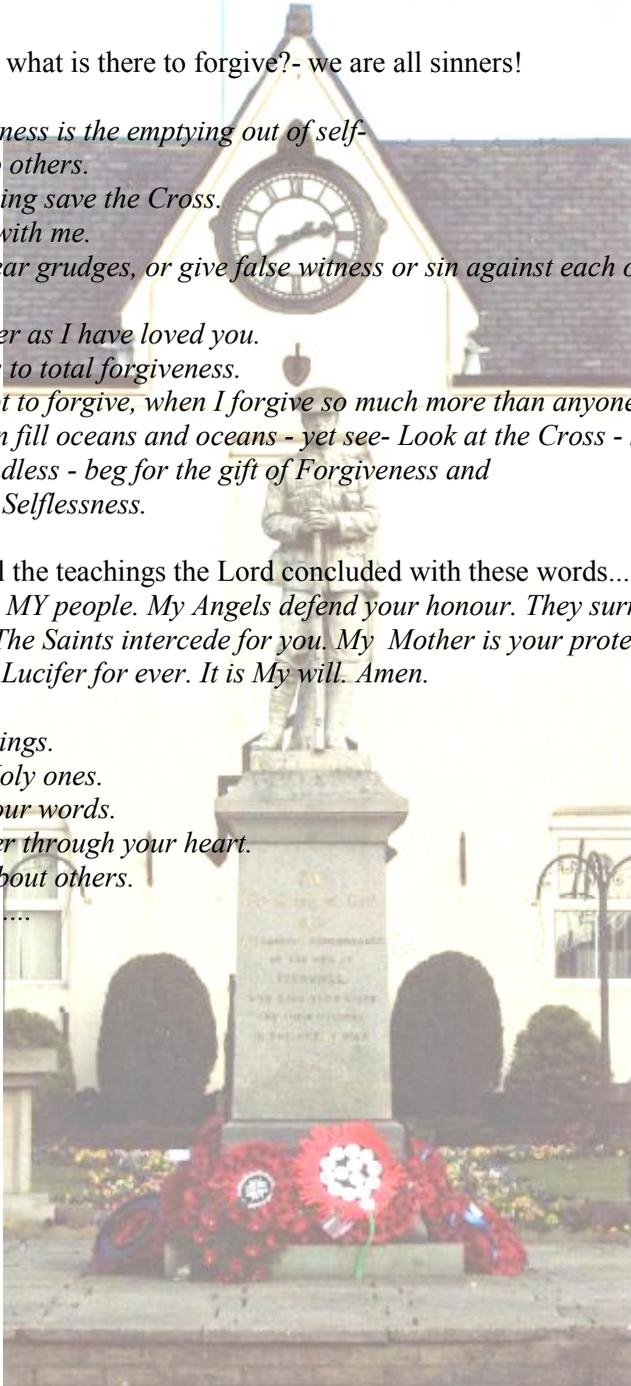
*Pray with All Holy ones.*

*Let Me guide your words.*

*Speak My prayer through your heart.*

*Do not worry about others.*

*Just do as I ask.....*



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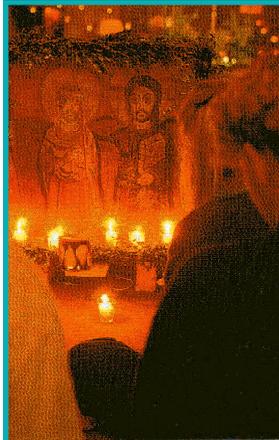
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To communicate Christ,  
is there any light  
more transparent  
than a life steeped in forgiveness  
and an infinite goodness,  
a life  
in which reconciliation  
is lived out  
day after day?

*Brother Roger of Taizé*

Halina Holman lives in the North East of England. Married to Michael and recently Widowed she has three "grown up children", two daughters and a son. She also has three grandchildren, two grandsons and a granddaughter.