

Mercy and Forgiveness: A means to *Healing of the Heart*

Consecrate Life Convocation – March 10, 2018

Virtue – “A virtue is a habitual and firm disposition to do the good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself. The virtuous person tends toward the good with all his sensory and spiritual powers; he pursues the good and chooses it in concrete actions.” – CCC 1803

Cardinal Virtues – help govern and guide our moral lives. (CCC 1805-1809)

- 1) **Temperance** – self-control
- 2) **Fortitude** – courage and perseverance
- 3) **Justice** – giving people what they deserve or treating others fairly
- 4) **Prudence** – wisely applying right reason to action

Theological Virtues – given as a gift – not simply by human effort (CCC 1812 – 1829)

- a. **Dispose** – the Christian to be in relationship with the Blessed Trinity
- b. **Object** – have God as their object, origin, and motive
- c. **Infused** – into our soul by God through Baptism
- d. **Animate** – give life to our moral lives
- e. **Revealed** – to us through Scripture (1 Cor. 13:13)

- 1) **Faith** – freely believe in God, the Church, and Sacred Scripture
- 2) **Hope** – expectation that we will receive goodness, love, and eternal reward from God
- 3) **Charity** – self-giving love of God and our neighbor - brings us into union with God

1 Corinthians 13:13 – “So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

What is Mercy? – Mercy is...

- 1) **Generally** – a moral virtue that helps us to consistently be charitable to all those we encounter
- 2) **Misericordia** – *miseri* – misery *cordia* – heart – heartfelt compassion for a person who is in misery
- 3) **Sympathy, Pity, or Compassion** – due to another person’s distress or suffering
- 4) **Compels us** – to try to give assistance, relief, or support in a time of need.
- 5) **More specifically:**
 - a. **Pity / Sympathy** - having sorrow for a visible evil that’s been committed against another person, which could have a corruptive or distressing effect on them.
 - b. **Compassion** – in fullest sense the other person’s distress becomes our own.
 - c. **Easier to have** – if the given evil was not chosen or caused by the one experiencing it, such as an accident that one did not anticipate OR when the evil that has occurred was suffered undeservedly and unjustly by the other person.
 - d. **Can cause** – one to grieve or be sorrowful in response to another’s distressing situation or circumstance.

- e. **Highest form** – to not only pity the victim, but also the Offender, who has injured both the victim and himself through the offense.
- f. **Fall under charity** – according to St. Thomas Aquinas, Mercy (Q.30), Almsgiving (Q. 32), and Fraternal Correction (Q. 33) fall under charity.
- g. **Greatest virtue in relation to our Neighbor** – because mercy gives to others self-sacrificially and seeks to help or provide assistance and be with another in their suffering.

What do you find challenging about practicing the Virtue of Mercy (with others, in your family, toward yourself, etc.)?

What is Forgiveness? – *Forgiveness is ...*

Basic Definition: Forgiveness – overcoming resentment toward an Offender, but not denying yourself the moral right to such resentment as you try to have a new stance of benevolence, compassion, and love toward the Offender, even though the Offender has no moral right to such a merciful response.

- a) **Overcoming resentment** (re-occurring anger) – toward an Offender
- b) **Not denying** – that you've been hurt
- c) **Compassion and Love** – shown to the Offender
- d) **Unconditional Gift** – recognizing that you are giving the Offender a gift

What Forgiveness is NOT – *Forgiveness is NOT...*

- 1) **Reconciliation** – requires the participation of 2 people
 Forgiveness – only requires the moral action of one person
- 2) **Denial** – of the wrong or pretending that nothing happened = Repression
- 3) **Opening yourself up** – to being hurt again = Enabling the Offender to hurt you
- 4) **Condoning or Excusing** – letting people get away with what they did = Unjust
- 5) **Forgetting** – the offense ever occurred = may be impossible to forget
- 6) **Immediately changing** – your feelings in regards to what happened = Feelings follow Actions
- 7) **Pseudo-forgiveness** – pretending you are forgiving = Skipping the process of working through confusing emotions
- 8) **A Choice between Justice or Mercy** = You can forgive and still desire justice

Have any of these confused you in the past (i.e. you thought it equaled forgiving but now you see that it does not)? If so, which one and why?

Forgiveness is ...

- 1) ***Just*** – “Forgiveness is in no way opposed to justice, as if to forgive meant to overlook the need to right the wrong done. It is rather the fullness of justice, leading to that tranquility of order which is much more than a fragile and temporary cessation of hostilities, involving as it does the deepest healing of the wounds which fester in human hearts. Justice and forgiveness are both essential to such healing.” – St. John Paul II – *World Day of Peace* – 2002
- 2) ***Recognizing our Common Humanity*** – No matter what they’ve done the fact remains they are a person with inherent dignity, value, and worth.
- 3) ***Attitude of Goodwill / moral virtue*** – “Forgiveness is more than a skill. It is an attitude of goodwill and a moral virtue that develops. It even becomes part of your identity, part of who you are, as you begin to incorporate it into your life. Forgiveness has a way of transforming your character and relationships as you understand and practice it.”
– Dr. Robert Enright – *Forgiveness is a Choice*
- 4) ***Loving as God loves*** – “We’re not just forgiving because we believe our Offenders’ apologies are sincere, and they won’t trouble us again— because sometimes they’re not sincere, sometimes they don’t even bother to say they’re sorry... we forgive as God forgives, in imitation not only of the quantity but also the quality of His forgiveness. Like God, we forgive, not merely by forgetting, but by loving.” – Dr. Scott Hahn - *Understanding 'Our Father'*
- 5) ***Reducing*** – negative *feelings* (resentment), *thoughts* (wicked person), and *behaviors* (avoidance) toward the Offender

Increasing – positive *feelings* (respect), *thoughts* (wishing them well), and *behaviors* (smile) toward the Offender – Dr. Robert Enright – *Forgiveness is a Choice*

Have you thought of all of these before in relationship to forgiveness? If not, which one of these provides you with a new insight into forgiveness?

BENEFITS of forgiving...

St. Thomas Aquinas' – 5 benefits:

- 1) **Useful** – your sins will be forgiven
- 2) **Necessary** – you will avoid the sins of unforgiveness, anger, or revenge
- 3) **Friendship** – leads to deeper friendships
- 4) **You will win** – the victory by winning the love of the other person
- 5) **Answered prayers** – God will hear your prayers

Dr. Enright – 8 benefits:

- 1) **Quiets angry feelings** – *psychological health*
- 2) **Changes destructive thoughts to healthy ones** – *psychological health*
- 3) **More civil toward the one who hurt you** – *improve relationship*
- 4) **Helps you to interact better with others** – *improve relationship*
- 5) **Improves relationship with the one who hurt you** – *offender's well-being*
- 6) **Helps the one who hurt you** – *offender's well-being*
- 7) **God asks us to** – *intrinsic quality*
- 8) **Act of love and kindness** – *intrinsic quality*

Which of these benefits appeals to you the most, and why?

CONSEQUENCES of NOT forgiving...

- 1) **Transference of anger** – spilling over into other relationships including spouse or children
- 2) **Internalization of anger** – leads to health problems (high blood pressure, heart disease / attack)
- 3) **Suppression of anger** – leading to depression
- 4) **Excessive Expression of anger** – leading to destructive words, actions, and even violence
- 5) **Allows the cycle of violence to continue** – does not address the need of the Offender

What do you think about considering the consequences of NOT forgiving? How might this change your motivation or desire to forgive?

4 – Final Points on Forgiveness – Dr. Enright – *Forgiveness is a Choice*

1) *Forgiveness is a Choice* –

“Forgiving is a choice, one you are free to make or to reject. Even if you begin, you can stop the process if forgiveness seems irrelevant or too painful for you. You can take it up again when you are ready.” – Dr. Enright

“Forgiveness is above all a personal choice, a decision of the heart to go against the natural instinct to pay back evil with evil.” – St. John Paul II – *World Day of Peace* – 2002

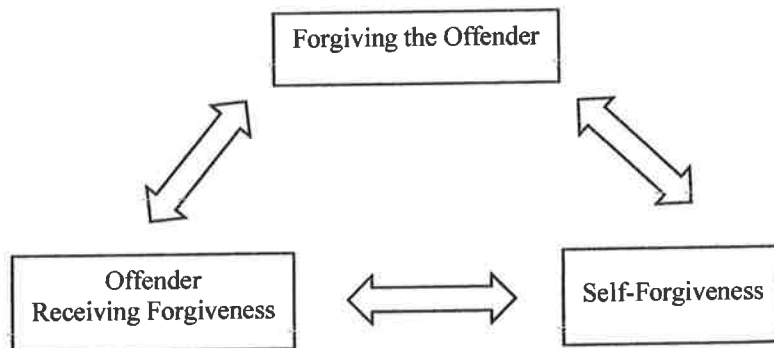
2) *Forgiveness is a Process* – includes 4 Phases and 20 Guideposts according to Dr. Enright

It is a series of choices, as well as personal realizations that happen over the course of time. Thus, the process of forgiveness is unique and specific to each individual person in terms of the amount of time it will take.

3) *Forgiveness is a Triad* –

- a. **Forgiving** (by the one Offended)
- b. **Receiving Forgiveness** (by the Offender)
- c. **Self-Forgiveness** (by the Offender towards himself)

Forgiveness Triad / Triangle



4) *Forgiveness is a Life-style* –

“Over the years, I have mused about so many injustices caused by so many wounds, and I have realized that to go after all of this woundedness, we must go beyond practicing forgiveness to actually living The Forgiving Life. This entails forgiving, then forgiving some more, then learning to love this moral virtue until it becomes a part of us.” – Dr. Enright – *The Forgiving Life*

**Who is one person in your life now or from the past that you need to forgive?
How might this presentation help motivate you to do this?**