

**"Unless you forgive your brother from the heart..."**

*In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.*

**Once upon a time**, author Doris Donnelly wrote a book entitled 'Putting Forgiveness into Practice.' It contained this moving story.

*One day a 7-year-old boy was riding in the back seat of the family car. He was seated between his two older brothers. Mother was driving. On this day, his mother was feeling particularly distraught over being recently abandoned by their father.*

*Suddenly, in a fit of anger, she spun around & struck the 7-year-old across the face, yelling: "And you. I never wanted you. The only reason I had you was to keep your father. But he left any way. I hate you."*

*That scene branded itself on the boy's memory. Over the years, the mother reinforced her feelings toward him by constantly finding fault with him. Years later that boy told Doris Donnelly:*

*"I can't tell you how many times in the last 23 years I relived that experience in the car. Probably 1,000's of times.*

*But (the proverbial 'BUT' in life), recently, I put myself in my mother's shoes. Here she was, a high school graduate with no money, no job, & 3 kids to support. I realized how lonely & depressed she must have felt. I thought of her anger and pain and of how much I reminded her of the failure of her young hopes and dreams.*

*And so, one day I decided to visit her and to talk to her. I told her of how I understood her feelings and that I loved her just the same.*

*She broke down and we wept in each other's arms for what seemed hours. It was the beginning of a new life for me, for her---for us."*

*That TRUE story is a beautiful illustration of the healing power of forgiveness. Shakespeare said:*

**"Forgiveness is twice blest."** *It blesses the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven.*

**'How so?'** you ask. **Well—I'm glad you asked that question!**

**1<sup>st</sup>**, **forgiveness blesses the one who forgives.** *Take the young man in the story. He says that when he forgave his mother, it was the beginning of a new life for him.*

*Time after time, we hear of people say the same thing after they have forgiven someone.*

**For example**, a young woman, who forgave her father after not talking for 7 years, said of the experience: **"It was like being released from prison. I was free and happy... for the first time in 7 years."**

*So, the 1<sup>st</sup> point about forgiveness is that it blesses the one who forgives.*

**2<sup>nd</sup>**, **forgiveness blesses the one who IS forgiven.** *Again, take the young man in the opening story. His forgiveness of his mother blessed her in an amazing way: It literally healed her! She was transformed*

*from a person who was so bitter that she told her son, "I hate you & never wanted you," to someone who told him, "I love you & want you with all my heart."* Again, time after time, we hear of people who have been transformed when someone has forgiven them. **For example:**

*Take the widely publicized case of the mother who forgave the man who murdered her daughter. Prison officials said her act of forgiveness transformed him into a model prisoner.*

*So, the 2<sup>nd</sup> point about forgiveness is that it also blesses the one who IS forgiven!*

Now this raises a practical question of two. **‘What do we do when we find we can’t forgive someone?’**

**‘What do we do to get rid of the emotional block?’** you ask? Well...I’m glad you asked that question!

Again, back to the young man in the story. The thing that made the difference between his ability to forgive his mother & his prior inability to do so was **his changed perception of her**. He got in her moccasins, so to speak, & saw the event/situation thru HER eyes, from HER perspective—totally divesting his own feelings/perspective. He no longer saw her as a terrible person, who did a terrible thing to that little boy in the car. He saw her as a lonely, abandoned, depressed young woman with no job, money, & 3 kids to raise. THAT’S what gave him the ability to forgive her... his changed perspective; he saw thru HER eyes!

The point is clear: If we are to forgive others, we must make the effort to see our relationship with new eyes, with a new perspective and make the effort, ultimately, to see them as Jesus sees them—not as a terrible person, but as frightened, hurt children of his Father, who have lost their way.

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Today’s readings invite us to ask ourselves about our relationships with others. If they aren’t what they should be, we should make the effort to change them—just as that brave, young man did. It can lead to a whole new life for us—and for those we forgive.

I close with the Prayer of St. Francis.

**“Lord, make ME an instrument of your peace.**

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
 where there is injury, pardon;  
 where there is doubt, faith;  
 where there is despair, hope;  
 where there is darkness, light;  
 and where there is sadness, joy.

Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;  
 to be understood as to understand;  
 to be loved as to love;  
 for it is in giving that we received;  
 it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
**and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.”**

May almighty God, our Abba, bless you with ‘inner-peace’, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.