

Reflections While Walking

Forgiveness

- Deacon Bob Salvestrini -

When Peter asked Jesus how often must he forgive a brother who sins against him Jesus replied, "... not seven times but seventy-seven times." Jesus did not intend to provide some sort of mathematical constraint on God's capacity to forgive. Nor did He wish to limit the number of times we should forgive someone whom we feel has hurt us or forgive ourselves for some offense we may have committed. He was pointing out God's limitless capacity to forgive and indicating that His disciples should strive to do the same.

A person was released from the bondage of sin when Jesus granted forgiveness, and physical healing also usually accompanied the forgiveness. Today while the ability to forgive sins is reserved for priests, we do have the power to promote healing when we forgive.

Healing begins with the desire to dismiss within ourselves any desire to hurt the person who has hurt us or hurt someone we love. Forgiveness does not remove the fact that in some situations punishment may still need to be administered to achieve justice. Recall Pope John Paul II forgave Mohamet Ali Agca for his attempted assassination but still thought punishment was appropriate. It is through forgiveness that goodwill is restored toward the offender. Through forgiveness resentment and hate toward the offender are banished. Resentment and hate are emotions that eat at the soul and prevent us from loving as Christians; the kind of love that is necessary to truly forgive. We can will ourselves to forgive someone for being rude, or our spouse for harsh words, or even someone who cheats us, and doing so restores good will and heals our soul.

Wouldn't it be ironic if you had to spend eternity seated next to the person who hurt you and you were unable to forgive?