

From the Desk of Marie Marton . . .

Loving our enemies and learning how to turn the other cheek is not always easy. Too often we are so overburdened with the duties of the day, that we are just too tired to treat others as we ourselves would like to be treated.

Consider this story of the "Smith" family:

Their day did not start out very well. They all overslept. The husband blamed his wife for not setting the alarm and the wife asked why it was always her job to do it? It just didn't seem fair that the blame should fall upon her. After a quick peck on the cheek and a mumbled apology, he left for work. Was that an apology? Was she supposed to just forgive and forget? Running late, now she had to get the kids ready for school.

Shoes? Lunch boxes? Homework and textbooks? She yelled at Mary to make the lunches and fix the oatmeal as she tried to find Joey's left shoe and at the same time the school bus was tooting its horn at the end of the driveway. Voices were raised, eyes were tearing and the kids were blaming each other for all of the problems of the morning.

Mary rushed to her classroom right off the bus. Her assignment was due but it was nowhere to be found. It wasn't her fault. She wouldn't have lost the paper if she didn't have to help make the oatmeal. Mary's frustration was evident in class and her teacher was not too happy. Mary was reprimanded in front of the entire class. And on and on it goes. One incident – a missed alarm – seemed to cause problems for many people over the course of the day. Most likely the situation could have been handled better by all of the parties involved.

Psychologists will tell you that forgiveness really benefits the person who is offering the forgiveness. If we keep feelings of resentment locked up inside, they impact our lives and the lives of those around us. We can become filled with anxiety, anger and resentment. If we keep feelings inside us when we attempt to worship God in Church or in daily prayer, it sours our conversation and turns our efforts of prayer into a litany of complaints and requests for justice.

We all have heard incredible stories of people who have been greatly wronged, but forgave those who caused them harm. Certainly, there can be no greater story than that of Jesus who asked God the Father to forgive us all—since we did not know what we were doing—at the exact time that He was being crucified. In dying, Jesus showed the ultimate gift of love. What is important is the sound advice of Jesus. There is no greater love than to give up one's life for one's friends. This is the epitome and the true marker of one's love. Jesus set the mark and He set it very high.

Who can forget the stories of forgiveness by the Amish people following the schoolhouse shooting which left many of the youngest members of their community dead? Or the stories of forgiveness by parents of college shooting victims. Or even the act of forgiveness offered by Pope John Paul II to the man who attempted his assassination? Indeed, how could he do anything less? How could the Pope ask millions of Catholics to forgive those who harmed them if he did not also extend his own act of forgiveness?

These acts of forgiveness are evidence of the individual's love for God. We can't go up to God and give Him a hug---but we can hug our neighbor. We simply can't tell God how much we love Him if we don't act on it with our neighbor. In the absence of actions of love toward those about us, our words would be meaningless.

We need to think about others first and put their needs above our own. It is only when we seek the kingdom and will of God in the world and not assert our own needs and wants that we can truly and wholly love our God.

There are certainly benefits of forgiveness: First and foremost, it is proof of our love of God. It will hopefully help the person forgiven to notice this love and be so impressed that he or she will be encouraged to love God by also forgiving those who have harmed him or her. It will free us from the anxiety, anger, resentment that will ferment over the course of our day and sourly impact the lives of others.

Now that we do know the benefits, let's go out and forgive at least one person today. It would be great if we each acted on that forgiveness:

- Bake that cake for that cross old neighbor who mowed over your tulips or for the little boy who mistook your front window for the pitcher's mound and added some additional air conditioning to your living room;
- Let that shopper who just plowed her cart into your ankles go ahead of you at the cash register; or
- Write a letter to Aunt Sue or Cousin Tom who insulted your cooking at last year's family reunion.

It doesn't have to be big. We can all start out small. Just try to remember to start. You will feel a lot better. Those you forgive will feel a whole lot better. God will certainly feel a lot better. And, who knows, that feeling just might grow on you.