

"Our Father...forgive us...as we forgive others."

We are all familiar with Jesus' teaching to love one another as he loves us. (John 15:12) But we are, perhaps, less familiar with his teaching to forgive one another as he forgives us. (Matthew 6:12-14)

Here is a short story about someone who learned to forgive and he forgave others*

A 17-year-old boy named Charles Rumbaugh escaped from a mental hospital in Texas, where he was being treated for manic depression. Shortly after his escape, he robbed a jewelry store and killed its owner in an unexpected shoot-out. He was caught and sentenced to death. When he arrived on death row, the officer in charge told him, "If you give us any trouble, we'll kill you in whatever way we want to. Nobody's going to care enough to do anything about it." During the next ten years on death row, Rumbaugh says he was beaten and subjected "to numerous ingenious little punishments." Understandably, with this kind of treatment he built up a lot of hate in his heart. Finally, the day drew near for his execution at Huntsville, Texas. As it did, he told a friend:

"There comes a time when we have to return good for evil, no matter what the price. Right now, I can't think of a single reason for liking anybody in the whole state of Texas, but I know that to carry around a lot of hate in my heart isn't what Christ wants me to do."

Then he asked his friend to pray that he would rise above his bitterness and forgive those who sinned against him, as he hoped those he had sinned against would forgive him. On the night of September 1, 1985, he was strapped down for execution. They do this in such a way that the arms are outstretched to form a cross. When everything was ready for giving the lethal injection, the warden said to him, "Do you want to make any final statement?" Rumbaugh paused and then said to those present, "You may not forgive me my transgressions against you, but I forgive you your transgressions against me."

Someone who was present and heard the young man utter these words of forgiveness was struck by the similarity between Jesus, who with arms outstretched on the cross forgave his executioners, and the young man, with arms also outstretched who forgave his executioners.

This story illustrates in a dramatic way Jesus' teaching that we should forgive others as he forgives us. It goes a step further. It illustrates that forgiving others is not always easy.

To use the words of Mary in today's gospel, it is not always easy to "do whatever [Jesus] tells you."

When this is the case, we must do what the young prisoner did. We must pray for the power to do what Jesus tells us to do: to forgive. And if we do, God will give us the grace to forgive. In return for forgiving others, we will be able to die as the young man did, confident that God "will forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

Then you will know that

YOU ARE LOVED,
Deacon Dan

*story as told by Fr. Mark Lin