

Forgiveness: The Narrow Gate—and the Gentle Mercy of God

My Dear Parish Family,

“God is love,” teaches Sacred Scripture (1 John 4:8). Scripture is equally clear: we cannot claim to love God while refusing love to our brothers and sisters. Love and forgiveness belong together. Yet the Church also knows—and the Lord knows—that forgiveness is often one of the most difficult commands of the Gospel.

Jesus never speaks of forgiveness lightly. He understands its cost. He tells us: “The gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few” (Matthew 7:13–14). For many—especially those who have been deeply wounded—this narrow gate can feel frightening or even overwhelming. Experiences of abuse, betrayal, violence, neglect, or deep injustice can leave real wounds in the heart. In such cases, the struggle to forgive is often not a refusal of love, but a wounded heart trying to survive.

Let us pause here for a moment and breathe in the mercy of God.

Unforgiveness, when it takes root, can slowly close the heart to grace and weigh the soul down. Yet God does not confuse woundedness with hardness of heart. He sees the struggle, not only the outcome. He is close to those who suffer, and He walks patiently with them.

For this reason, Jesus places forgiveness at the very center of prayer: “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.” He then adds words that are challenging yet ultimately liberating: “If you forgive others their sins, your heavenly Father will forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your sins” (Matthew 6:12, 14–15). These words are not meant to burden the wounded or rush healing. God does not demand instant emotional resolution, nor does He deny the reality of trauma.

Forgiveness is often a slow and uneven journey, requiring grace, prayer, time, and sometimes professional support. God is patient. He never abandons those who are trying, even when they feel stuck. It is essential to understand clearly what forgiveness is not. Forgiveness:

- does not deny the reality of evil
- does not excuse sin, abuse, or injustice
- does not erase consequences or accountability
- does not require reconciliation or continued closeness when boundaries are necessary for safety

Forgiveness is the decision—sometimes made daily, sometimes imperfectly—to place judgment in God’s hands and to refuse revenge. As Saint Paul teaches: “Do not avenge yourselves but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord’” (Romans 12:19). When resentment is allowed to rule the heart, the one who caused harm can continue to harm us interiorly. Forgiveness, even when incomplete and fragile, begins to loosen those chains and restore freedom—often little by little.

The Church points to witnesses who show us that forgiveness is possible only by grace, not by human strength alone. One such witness is St. Maria Goretti, who forgave her attacker as she lay dying and entrusted justice to God. Her story is not a standard imposed on all, nor a measure of holiness for the wounded. It is a sign of what divine grace can accomplish in its own time and way.

Not everyone is called to heroic forgiveness, and no one is called to it prematurely. But all are invited to bring their wounds honestly before the Lord, who alone can heal what human effort cannot. Each of us

must face a serious truth: our soul is eternal. What shapes our heart shapes our journey toward God. Yet God judges with mercy, not harshness. He sees the longing, the struggle, and the desire to heal.

True love for God requires the gradual surrender of self-reliance—the instinct to control outcomes, protect pride, or cling to vengeance as a shield against pain. Those who seek their own security struggle to forgive. Those who slowly learn to trust God discover humility, surrender, and peace.

Saint Paul exhorts us: “Be kind and compassionate to one another; forgive one another as God has forgiven you in Christ” (Ephesians 4:32). And again: “Be imitators of God, as beloved children” (Ephesians 5:1). And the Lord Himself gently invites us “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart” (Matthew 11:29). As we grow in awareness of how deeply God loves us—especially in our woundedness—our love for Him is purified and strengthened. Divine love slowly loosens the grip of bitterness and frees us from the heavy burden of carrying judgments we were never meant to bear. Though we still live in the world, we begin to live more deeply in God.

If you are struggling to forgive, begin gently. Ask the Lord for the grace to want to forgive. Speak to Him honestly about your resistance and your fear. Bring your wounds to prayer, to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, to Eucharistic adoration, or to a trusted spiritual guide or counselor. God never despises an honest heart, and He never rushes the wounded.

May the Lord, rich in mercy, heal what is broken, protect what is vulnerable, soften what is hardened, and lead us—step by step—through the narrow gate into the joy prepared for His children.

In Christ,

Fr. Vilaire Philius/Pastor