

**“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” (Lk 6:36)**

From what St. Luke tells us, after proclaiming the beatitudes to his disciples, Jesus made his revolutionary call: to love every person as a brother or sister, even those considered enemies. Jesus fully knows and explains to us that we are all brothers and sisters because we have one Father.

Continually seeking out his children, God wants to build a relationship with us. While holding us up to our responsibilities, God’s love heals, nourishes and takes care of us. It is a mother’s attitude, compassionate and tender.

This is the mercy of God that reaches out personally to every human being, with all their weaknesses. In fact, God prefers those who are marginalized, excluded and rejected.

Mercy is a love that fills the heart and flows out to others, to neighbors as well as strangers, to society around us. Since we are children of God, we can imitate his characteristics of love, acceptance and knowing how to wait for the right time for others.

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Unfortunately, in our personal and social lives we breathe an atmosphere of growing hostility and competition, of mutual suspicion, categorical judgments and fear of others. Grudges accumulate and lead to conflicts and wars.

As Christians, we can go against the mainstream by giving a clear-cut witness. We can take the step to be free from ourselves and from external circumstances, and begin to rebuild the weakened or broken bonds in our family, in our workplace, in the parish community or in our political party.

If we have hurt someone, let’s have the courage to ask forgiveness and start again. It is an act of great dignity. If someone has truly offended us, let’s try to forgive them and make room for that person once more in our heart, so that the wound can heal.

But what is forgiveness?

Focolare founder Chiara Lubich wrote in a commentary to scripture in October 1981: “Forgiveness is not forgetfulness ... it is not weakness ... it does not mean taking serious things lightly, or considering as good what is in fact bad ... it is not indifference. Forgiveness is a clear-sighted act of will, and thus a free act that welcomes the other as he or she is, despite the wrong done to us, just as God welcomes us sinners, despite our faults.”

Forgiveness means not reacting to the injuries received with more wrongdoing, but doing what Paul says: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (see Rom 12:21). Such openheartedness cannot be improvised. It is a daily conquest, a constant

growing in our identity as children of God. Above all, it is a gift from the Father that we can and must ask from him.

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A young woman from the Philippines told us her story: “I was only 11 when my father was killed, but justice was not upheld because we were poor. When I grew up, I studied law because I wanted justice for my father’s death. But God had another plan for me. A colleague invited me to meet people who were seriously committed to putting the Gospel into practice. I started doing the same.

“One day I asked Jesus to teach me how to live his words “Love your enemies” (cf. Mt 5:44) in a real way, because I still felt hatred within me for the men who had killed my father. The next day, at work, I met the head of that criminal group. I greeted him with a smile and asked about his family.

“He was astonished by this, and I was even more surprised at what I had done. The hatred within me started breaking down and was transformed into love. However, that was only the first step: love is creative! I thought that every member of that criminal group had to receive our forgiveness. My brother and I visited them to re-establish a relationship and bear witness that God loves them! One man asked our forgiveness for what he had done, as well as prayers for himself and his family.”

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