

With new eyes

March 2022

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. (Mt.6:12)

This month's word of life is taken from the prayer Jesus taught his disciples, the Lord's Prayer. It is a prayer deeply rooted in Jewish tradition. The Jews also called and call God 'Our Father'.

On a first reading, the words of this phrase seem to challenge us: can we ask God to cancel our debts, as the Greek text suggests, in the same way that we ourselves are able to do with people who are indebted to us? Our capacity for forgiveness is always limited, superficial, and conditioned.

If God were to treat us according to our measure, we would really be condemned!

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

These are important words that first of all express the awareness of needing God's forgiveness. Jesus himself shared them with the disciples, and therefore with all the baptised, so that they could turn to the Father with simplicity of heart.

Everything stems from discovering ourselves to be children in the Son, brothers and sisters and imitators of Jesus who was the first to make his life a journey of ever more total adhesion to the loving will of the Father.

It is only after accepting God's gift of his boundless love, that we can ask the Father for everything. We can even ask him to make us more and more like him and, with a generous heart, have the ability to forgive our brothers and sisters, day after day.

Every act of forgiveness is a free and conscious choice, which must always be renewed with humility. It is never a habit, but a demanding pathway and Jesus makes us pray for it daily, just as we pray for our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

How many times have the people with whom we live - in our families, in our neighbourhoods, at work or at school offended us – and, as a consequence, we find it difficult to relate positively to them? What can we do? It is here that we can ask for the grace to imitate the Father:

*'Let us get up in the morning with a complete "amnesty" in our hearts, with that love that covers everything, that knows how to welcome the other person as he or she is, with his or her limitations, his or her difficulties, just as a mother would do with her son who makes a mistake: she always excuses him, always forgives him, always hopes in him... Let us approach everyone by seeing them with new eyes, as if they had never had those faults. Let us begin again each time, knowing that God not only forgives, but forgets: this is the measure he requires of us too.'*ⁱ

Trusting in the help of prayer, we can journey forward towards this lofty goal.

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

The whole of the Lord's Prayer, the Our Father, has the perspective of fraternity, it speaks of 'us': I ask not only for myself but also for and with others. My capacity for forgiveness is sustained by the love of others, but at the same time, my love can in some way be affected by the mistakes that my neighbour has made. Perhaps even this depends on me - maybe I have not done all I could to make the other person feel welcomed and understood...

In Palermo, Italy, some Christian communities have much experience of collaboration and dialogue with one another and this necessitates overcoming various difficulties. Biagio and Zina recount: 'One day a pastor friend invited us to meet some families in his Church who did not know us. We had brought something to share for lunch but those families made us understand that we were not welcome. Very gently Zina offered them a taste of the specialities she had cooked and, in the end, we ate together. After lunch, they began to point out the faults they saw in our Church. Not wanting to get into a verbal war, we asked what defects or differences between our Churches can prevent us from loving each other? The group was used to constant criticism and condemnation and so they were amazed and disarmed by such an answer. We began to talk about the Gospel and what unites us and this is certainly much more than what divides us. When it was time to say goodbye, they did not want us to leave, at which point we proposed praying the Lord's Prayer, during which we felt the presence of God very strongly. They made us promise that we would visit again because they wanted us to get to know the rest of the community, and this has been the case over several years.'

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ⁱ Chiara Lubich, Word of Life Dec 2004