



From what St Luke tells us, after proclaiming the beatitudes to his disciples, Jesus then made his revolutionary invitation to love every person as a brother or sister, even if they are known to be an enemy. Jesus knows very well, and has explained to us, that we are all brothers and sisters because we have one Father who always seeks out his children. He wants to relate to us, reminding us of our responsibilities while at the same time his love heals, nourishes and takes care of us. His attitude is motherly, compassionate and tender. This is the mercy of God, who 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 neighbours as well as strangers, to society around us. Since we are children of God, we can resemble him in his characteristics of love, acceptance, and knowing how to wait until it is the right time for others.

“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”

Unfortunately, in our personal and social life 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 flow by giving a clear cut witness. We can take the step to be free from ourselves and from outside circumstances, and begin to rebuild the weakened or broken bonds in the family, in our workplace, in the parish community or 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 him or her and make room for that person once more in our heart, so that they too can heal the wound. But what is forgiveness? Chiara Lubich explained it like this: “Forgiveness is not forgetfulness, it is not weakness, it does not mean taking lightly things that are serious, 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 wrongs done with more wrongs, but doing what Paul says: ‘Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good’ (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.

“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful”

A young woman from the Philippines told us her story: "I was only eleven when my father was killed, but justice was not done 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 living the Gospel. I started doing the same. One day I asked Jesus to teach me how to live His words 'Love your enemies' 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 decided that every member of the 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."

Letizia Magri