

## The Importance of the Virtues of Mercy and Forgiveness

**Virtue** – “A virtue is an habitual and firm disposition to do the good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself. The virtuous person tends toward the good with all his sensory and spiritual powers; he pursues the good and chooses it in concrete actions.” – Catechism 1803

**Cardinal Virtues** - temperance, fortitude, justice, and prudence.

- 1) **Temperance** – self-control
- 2) **Fortitude** – courage, perseverance
- 3) **Justice** – giving people what they deserve or treating others fairly
- 4) **Prudence** – applying right reason to action

**Theological Virtues** – faith, hope, charity

- a. **Object** - have God as their object
- b. **Infused** - in our Soul by God
- c. **Revealed** - to us through Scripture

- 1) **Faith** – belief and heartfelt trust in God
- 2) **Hope** – expectation that we will receive goodness, love, and eternal reward from God
- 3) **Charity** – self-giving love of God and neighbor - brings us into union with God

**1 Corinthians 13:13** – “So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

**Mercy** – *misericordia* – heartfelt compassion

- 1) **Sympathy, pity, or compassion** - due to another person’s distress
- 2) **Compels us** - to try to give assistance, relief, or support in a time of need.
- 3) **Generally** – a moral virtue that helps us to consistently live out a morally good life
- 4) **More specifically:**
  - a. **Pity** - having sorrow for a visible evil that’s been committed against another person, which could have a corruptive or distressing effect on them.
  - b. **Fullest sense** - the other person’s distress becomes our own.
  - c. **Easier to have** - if the given evil was not chosen or caused by the one experiencing it, such as an accident that one did not anticipate OR when the evil that has occurred was suffered undeservedly and unjustly by the other person.
  - d. **Can cause** - one to grieve or be sorrowful in response to another’s distressing situation or circumstance.
  - e. **Highest form** - to not only pity the victim, but also the Offender, who has injured both the victim and himself through the offense.
  - f. **The Greatest virtue in relation to our neighbor** - because mercy gives to others and seeks to help or provide assistance and be with another in their suffering.

**What do you find challenging about practicing the Virtue of Mercy (with others, in your family, toward yourself, etc.)?**

**Forgiveness** – overcoming resentment toward an Offender, but not denying yourself the moral right to such resentment as you try to have a new stance of benevolence, compassion, and love toward the Offender, even though the Offender has no moral right to such a merciful response.

- a) **Overcoming resentment** (re-occurring anger) – toward an Offender
- b) **Not denying** - that you've been hurt
- c) **Compassion and Love** – shown to the Offender
- d) **Unconditional Gift** - recognizing that you are giving the Offender a gift

**What Forgiveness is NOT – Forgiveness is NOT...**

- 1) **Reconciliation** – requires the participation of 2 people  
**Forgiveness** – only requires the moral action of one person
- 2) **Denial** – of the wrong or pretending that nothing happened
- 3) **Opening yourself up** – to being hurt again
- 4) **Condoning or Excusing** – letting people get away with what they did
- 5) **Justifying** – something that wasn't wrong
- 6) **Forgetting** – the offense ever occurred
- 7) **Immediately** – changing your feelings in regards to what happened
- 8) **Pseudo-forgiveness** – using it to manipulate or control others
- 9) **A Choice between justice or mercy**

**Have any of these confused you in the past (i.e. you thought it equaled forgiving but now you see that it does not)? If so, which one and why?**

**Forgiveness is...**

- 1) **Just** – “Forgiveness is in no way opposed to justice, as if to forgive meant to overlook the need to right the wrong done. It is rather the fullness of justice, leading to that tranquility of order which is much more than a fragile and temporary cessation of hostilities, involving as it does the deepest healing of the wounds which fester in human hearts. Justice and forgiveness are both essential to such healing.” – St. John Paul II
- 2) **Recognizing our Common Humanity** - the inherent value and worth of the person
- 3) **Attitude of Goodwill / moral virtue** - “Forgiveness is more than a skill—it is an attitude of goodwill and a moral virtue that develops. It even becomes part of your identity, part of who you are, as you begin to incorporate it into your life. Forgiveness has a way of transforming your character and relationships as you understand and practice it.”  
– Dr. Robert Enright *Forgiveness is a Choice*
- 4) **Loving as God loves** - We're not just forgiving because we believe our Offenders' apologies are sincere, and they won't trouble us again— because sometimes they're not sincere, sometimes they don't even bother to say they're sorry... we forgive as God forgives, in

imitation not only of the quantity but also the quality of His forgiveness. Like God, we forgive, not merely by forgetting, but by loving. – Dr. Scott Hahn - *Understanding 'Our Father'*

- 5) **Reducing** – negative feelings (resentment), thoughts (wicked person), and behaviors (avoidance) toward the Offender  
**Increasing** – positive feelings (respect), thoughts (wishing them well), and behaviors (smile) toward the Offender

**Have you thought of all of these before in relationship to forgiveness? If not, which one of these provides you with a new insight into forgiveness?**

### **BENEFITS of forgiving...**

**St. Thomas Aquinas' – 5 benefits:**

- 1) **Useful** – your sins will forgiven
- 2) **Necessary** – you will avoid the sin of unforgiveness, anger, or revenge
- 3) **Friendship** – leads to deeper friendships
- 4) **You will win** – the victory by winning the love of the other person
- 5) **Answered prayers** – God will hear your prayers

**Dr. Enright – 8 benefits:**

- 1) **Quiets angry feelings** – *psychological health*
- 2) **Changes destructive thoughts to healthy ones** – *psychological health*
- 3) **More Civil** toward the one who hurt you – *improve relationship*
- 4) **Helps you to interact better with others** – *improve relationship*
- 5) **Improves relationship with the one who hurt you** – *offender's well-being*
- 6) **Helps the one who hurt you** – *offender's well-being*
- 7) **God asks us to** – *intrinsic quality*
- 8) **Act of love and kindness** – *intrinsic quality*

**Which of these benefits appeals to you the most, and why?**

### **CONSEQUENCES of NOT forgiving...**

- 1) **Transference of anger** – spilling over into other relationships including spouse or children
- 2) **Internalization of anger** – leads to health problems (high blood pressure, heart disease / attack)
- 3) **Suppression of anger** – leading to depression
- 4) **Excessive Expression of anger** – leading to violence
- 5) **Allows the cycle of violence to continue** – does not address the need of the Offender

**What do you think about considering the consequences of NOT forgiving? How might this change your motivation or desire to forgive?**

#### **4 – Final Points on Forgiveness – Dr. Enright – *Forgiveness is a Choice***

##### **1) Forgiveness is a Choice**

“Forgiving is a choice, one you are free to make or to reject. Even if you begin, you can stop the process if forgiveness seems irrelevant or too painful for you. You can take it up again when you are ready.” – Dr. Enright

“Forgiveness is above all a personal choice, a decision of the heart to go against the natural instinct to pay back evil with evil.” – St. John Paul II

##### **2) Forgiveness is a Process – includes 4 Phases and 20 Guideposts – Dr. Enright**

It is a series of choices, as well as, personal realizations that happen over the course of time. Thus, the process of forgiveness is unique and specific to each individual person in terms of the amount of time it will take.

##### **3) Forgiveness is a Triad**

- a. **Forgiving**
- b. **Receiving Forgiveness**
- c. **Self-Forgiveness**

Includes: (1) **Forgiving** (by the one Offended),

(2) **Receiving forgiveness** (by the Offender),

(3) **Self-forgiveness** (by the Offender towards himself).

##### **4) Forgiveness is a Life-style**

“Over the years, I have mused about so many injustices caused by so many wounds, and I have realized that to go after all of this woundedness, we must go beyond practicing forgiveness to actually living The Forgiving Life. This entails forgiving, then forgiving some more, then learning to love this moral virtue until it becomes a part of us.” – Dr. Enright – *The Forgiving Life*

**Who is one person in your life now or from the past that you need to forgive? How might this presentation help motivate you to do this?**

#### **Recommended Resources:**

*Forgiveness is a Choice* – Dr. Robert Enright

*The Forgiving Life* – Dr. Robert Enright

*Dives in Misericordia: God is Rich in Mercy* – St. John Paul II – [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)

*Mercy & Forgiveness in Classical Moral Theology & Contemporary Psychology in light of Dives in Misericordia #14* – Thesis – Fr. Zyg Mazanowski – available St. Thomas Aquinas parish webpage

**Additional Questions / Comments are welcomed:** [zygmaz@yahoo.com](mailto:zygmaz@yahoo.com) - I promise to respond ☺