Forgiveness: The Key to Freedom and Peace

Rev. Joseph M. Esper

One of my favorite movies is *The Green Mile*, which stars Tom Hanks as a prison guard in Louisiana in 1935. He and the other guards assigned to death row were in charge of the prisoners there awaiting execution. One of these prisoners, a huge but gentle black man named John Coffee, was in fact innocent of the murder for which he had been convicted; it had actually been committed by another prisoner there—a vicious and hateful man known as Wild Bill. Even so, John Coffee was executed in the electric chair, causing profound sadness among the guards who had come to respect and love him.

*The Green Mile* is fictional—but it has some real parallels with actual events which occurred in Mississippi in 1944, involving a young black man named Claude Newman. An agricultural field worker who didn’t know how to read or write, Claude went home one day and found a fellow worker in his bedroom attempting to rape his wife. In his fury, Claude killed the man—who just happened to be a favorite of the farm’s overseer. Mississippi in 1944 wasn’t exactly known for extending justice to black men, and Claude found himself convicted of first degree murder and sentenced to death.

In prison, he and the other prisoners on death row were occasionally allowed to leave their cells and gather in a common area. One day Claude noticed another prisoner wearing a Miraculous Medal; when he asked about it, the other prisoner—ashamed to admit his lack of religious knowledge—flung it at him, saying, “Here; if you want it so much, keep it.” Not knowing its significance, Claude put it on around his neck.

That night the Virgin Mary appeared to Claude and said, “If you want me to be your Mother, send for a Catholic priest.” Thinking he was seeing a ghost, Claude cried out in terror; after Our Lady disappeared, he calmed down, and in the morning urgently requested the prison chaplain—a priest named Fr. O’Leary—visit him. Claude related what had happened, and Father invited him to join the convert class for prisoners he was conducting, assisted by several religious sisters from the parish. Claude agreed, and before long he shocked Fr. O’Leary and the nuns by eagerly explaining the meaning of the Sacrament of Reconciliation—which he understood perfectly, along with other Catholic teachings, because Our Lady had been visiting him in his cell and personally instructing him.

Claude was baptized at Easter, an event which filled him with exquisite delight. The other prisoners on death row were happy for him—except for one named Tom, who was filled with anger and hatred. The nicer Claude was to him, the more vicious he became. Fr. O’Leary suggested Claude pray especially hard for him; this just made Tom’s behavior even worse—which, as Fr. O’Leary explained to Claude, meant the devil was fighting fiercely to maintain his control over Tom. Finally the day scheduled for Claude’s execution arrived, and he couldn’t be happier; dying would allow him to join Jesus and Mary and rejoice in their presence forever. At ten minutes to midnight, however, the warden rushed in the room announcing that the governor had granted a two week stay of execution.
Claude was heartbroken, but Fr. O’Leary consoled him, suggesting he offer up his grief and disappointment as a sacrifice for Tom’s conversion. Claude did this, and two weeks later he was executed on the electric chair; afterwards, prison officials and other witnesses remarked they couldn’t remember ever seeing a prisoner about to be put to death being filled with so much peace and joy.

About a month later it was Tom’s turn for the electric chair. An angry former Catholic, he had bitterly denounced the Church; because Tom demanded no clergy be present, Fr. O’Leary remained out of sight, fearing his presence might provoke a string of blasphemies and curses. Tom was strapped in; he seemed to stare in shock and then horror at something over in the far corner of the room, and then shouted, “Get me a priest!” The room was cleared as Fr. O’Leary came over and heard the terrified prisoner’s confession. Afterwards, one of the prison officials asked Tom, “Son, just what was it that caused you to cry out in terror and then demand a priest?” Tom breathlessly explained that he suddenly saw Claude Newman in the corner of the room, with the Blessed Virgin standing behind him with her hands on his shoulders. Claude said, “Tom, because I spent my last weeks before death praying for you, Our Lady has granted my request that you be given this great gift: a vision of what awaits you unless you repent right now.” Then Tom was shown the place ready for him in hell, which caused him to cry out in terror and seize his last opportunity to convert.

Not only is this a true story; it’s a wonderful illustration of repentance, conversion, and forgiveness. Because Claude Newman was able to forgive the criminal justice system that had wrongly condemned him to death, and forgive a prisoner who had an intense and personal hatred for him, that man was saved from eternal damnation in the final moments of his life, and Claude himself was personally escorted by his Heavenly Mother into her Son’s glorious Kingdom. Mercy makes all the difference in our lives. Admitting our sinfulness and asking God to forgive us, and in turn being willing to forgive those who sin against us (even if at first they don’t want our forgiveness), allows us to discover and experience the freedom, peace, and fullness of life that God offers each of His children.

There’s a story about a businessman named John who went to the hospital to see his partner, Max, who was dying of some unknown malady. Max said, “John, before I die, I have to confess some things to you and ask your forgiveness. I robbed our firm of over $100,000. I sold our secret formula to our competitors, and even worse, I’m the one who supplied your wife with the evidence of your affair with our secretary, causing her to divorce you and clean you out in the divorce settlement.” Instead of responding with shock or anger, John simply said, “Oh, that’s ok, Max, I forgive you; after all, I’m the one who poisoned you.” Needless to say, taking revenge doesn’t count as a form of forgiveness; it’s like the person who said, “I’ve buried the hatchet—but I’ve left the handle sticking up.”

Too many people are tempted to do that; they want to be noble by forgiving, but they don’t want to give up the option of resuming their grudge in the future, just in case. Truly forgiving someone doesn’t allow for any loopholes; someone rightly defined forgiveness as “relinquishing my right to hurt back.” That definition conforms to the teaching of Jesus, for in fact, whenever someone sins against us, we’re confronted with the choice of responding according to the values of this world, or those of the Kingdom of God. According to the
great Christian author William Arthur Ward, “We are most like [the] beasts when we kill. We are most like men when we judge. We are most like God when we forgive.” Along those same lines, someone else said, “ Forgiveness is man’s deepest need and God’s highest achievement.” A more practical way of looking at the issue was given by Benjamin Franklin, who advised, “Doing an injury puts you below your enemy; revenging one, makes you even with him; forgiving it sets you above him.” It’s certainly true that our response to injury helps determine our own character; that’s why St. Augustine advised, “If you are suffering from a bad man’s injustice, forgive him—lest there be two bad men.”

It’s unwise to insist on strict justice, because we’ll almost always end up on the wrong side of a bad bargain. When Abraham Lincoln practiced law in Springfield, Illinois, a rich man sued a poor man for the $2.50 he claimed was owed him. The rich man asked Lincoln to represent him, and Honest Abe agreed—on the condition he be paid $10 in cash up front. Once this was done, Lincoln went to the poor man and offered him $5 if he’d immediately settle the alleged debt, and he agreed. Thus, it ended up that the poor man came out $2.50 ahead, Lincoln came out $5 ahead, and the rich man ended up $7.50 short—three times the original amount owed him—just so he could say he’d gained his rights. That approach is foolish when it comes to business affairs; it can be downright dangerous in spiritual matters. After hearing a sermon on forgiveness, a self-satisfied man remarked to the pastor, “I never forgive.” “Then, sir,” responded the pastor, “I hope that you never sin.”

If we are indeed free of all sin and have no need of God’s mercy, we can get away with not forgiving others—but, of course, none of us qualifies for that exemption. That’s why it’s said that “He who cannot forgive others destroys the bridge over which he himself must pass.” There’s a tragic story illustrating this point. A man in Kentucky had been convicted of murder. One of his old schoolmates was a personal friend of the governor, and also had the prestige of being decorated for bravery in rescuing several people from drowning. Because of his great influence, he was able to obtain a pardon for his friend. He went to visit the man in prison, but without telling him he had come to set him free. They chatted for a while, and then the visitor asked, “Sam, if you were pardoned and set free from here, what would be the first thing you would do?” The prisoner answered without hesitation, “I would go find the man who testified against me, and the judge who sentenced me, and kill them both.” The visitor sat in stunned silence for a moment, then sadly said good-bye; outside the prison he took the document of pardon from his pocket and tore it into fragments, letting the wind carry the pieces far away.

Refusing to forgive others is like ripping up God’s offer to forgive our own sins; anger and bitterness not only have negative effects, but lasting ones. A teenage girl had a fierce argument with her best friend; feeling terribly hurt, she related to her mother every bad thing, real and imagined, her friend had done. Finally the mother said, “Nell, don’t keep a record of wrongs. It’s fine for you to deal with your feelings, to have a confrontation with Millie, and even to end the friendship if you must—but don’t keep a record of her wrongs. It will only make you bitter and miserable.” That was good advice—for a refusal to try to forgive and forget not only hurts us spiritually and emotionally, but can actually be physiologically harmful. Research has shown that thinking malicious thoughts releases toxic chemicals that damage nerve cells in our brains (while positive thoughts help create
new and stronger nerve cells). Also, studies have shown that people who refuse to forgive have more stress-related disorders, weakened immune systems, and higher rates of heart disease than the general population. The most important negative consequence of an unforgiving heart, however, is that it alienates us from God, making it impossible for us to truly serve Him or feel His peace.

When Leonardo da Vinci was painting his masterpiece “The Last Supper,” he had a serious quarrel with a fellow artist. Barely able to contain his fury, he decided to avenge himself by using his rival’s face as the model for Judas Iscariot. However, when he next tried to paint the face of Christ, he found it impossible to do so; something was frustrating his efforts. Only when da Vinci humbled himself by seeking reconciliation with the other artist was this blockage removed—and the rest, as they say, is history. Unfortunately, not all stories of anger among Christians have such a happy ending. During a persecution of the Church in the 3rd century, a priest in Antioch named Sulpicius was arrested, tortured, and led away to be executed; it seemed he was going to merit the glory of a martyr’s death. However, he had engaged in a bitter quarrel with another Christian named Nicephorus, who called out to him, “Martyr of Christ, forgive me, for I have wronged you.” Sulpicius refused to respond, instead turning away his face from one imploring his forgiveness; then, even though he had not denied Christ under torture, he suddenly grew very fearful, wavered in his faith, and finally cried out, “Stop, do not kill me; I will obey the emperor, and I will sacrifice to the gods of Rome.” Nicephorus rushed forward and begged Sulpicius not to forfeit the martyr’s crown he was on the verge of winning, but in vain; Sulpicius renounced his faith—so Nicephorus proclaimed himself to be a Christian and willingly died instead. The early Church used this sad case of apostasy as a reminder that we cannot bear witness to Christ on our own; God’s grace is absolutely essential if we are to remain faithful—but this grace will not be granted to us if we harbor grudges or resentment in our hearts.

We are called to be witnesses of Christ’s mercy, for if people are to believe in a God of mercy, they must see God’s children acting mercifully. Blessed Titus Brandsma was a Dutch Carmelite priest arrested by the Nazis and sent to the infamous concentration camp of Dachau, where he was condemned to death by lethal injection. He gave his rosary to the nurse who injected him, assuring her of his forgiveness. His holy example eventually led to the woman’s conversion, and after the war, even though speaking out could mean she’d be arrested as a war criminal, the former Nazi nurse told his story to the world—and in 1985, 33 years after his death, she was an official guest as his beatification ceremony.

A willingness to forgive those who harm us is absolutely essential if we are to grow in holiness; this imitation of Jesus, Who forgave His enemies from the Cross, was shown by all the saints in one way or another. In the words of St. Teresa of Avila, “The saints rejoiced at injuries and persecutions, because in forgiving them they had something to present to God when they prayed to Him.” The more we show mercy, the more our Heavenly Father is pleased with us; the more we’re surrounded by hatred, the more brightly our light can shine forth. That’s why St. Francis of Assisi said, “Our friends, then, are all those who unjustly afflict us with trials and ordeals, shame and injustice, sorrows and torments, martyrdom and death; we must love them greatly for we all possess eternal life because of them.”
That is an amazing attitude, one which makes no sense to the world—but it’s supposed to be the mindset of Christians. We don’t have to go out looking for hostility and unjust treatment—but when it comes, we should recognize it as a chance to grow in sanctity by exercising forgiveness. In 1902 St. Maria Goretti, a girl of twelve, resisted the sexual advances of seventeen-year-old Alessandro Serenelli; enraged, he stabbed her numerous times and left her to die. A short while later she entered eternity, after telling her parents, “I forgive Alessandro. I forgive him with all my heart, and I want him to be with me in Heaven.” For many years it seemed unlikely Maria’s dying wish would be granted, for in prison Alessandro was filled with hatred and bitterness. Finally, however, he had a dream in which he saw Maria gathering beautiful flowers in a meadow and then presenting them to him as a sign of her love and forgiveness. Taking this as a sign from Heaven, Alessandro wept genuine tears of repentance, and when he was released from prison in 1937, he went directly to Mrs. Goretti and begged her forgiveness for murdering her daughter, which she readily granted. When 250,000 people gathered in Rome in 1950 for the canonization of St. Maria Goretti, side by side in the front row were the saint’s mother, and her murderer.

Our willingness to forgive another person—as Maria did for Alessandro—can sometimes lead to his or her repentance and salvation; in this sense, we have the power to set prisoners of sin and hatred free. However, we ourselves are many times the ones who need to be set free, for our hearts can easily be enslaved by anger and resentment. Once there was a widow in Colorado named Mrs. Hasula Hanna; tragically, her daughter—the only other member of her family—was murdered. The killer was captured, convicted, and sent to prison. Mrs. Hanna hated the man and refused to forgive him—until one day she realized her hatred and bitterness were eating away at her soul, robbing her of any chance at peace. With God’s help, she forgave the man in her heart, and sent the prisoner a Bible, along with a note saying that she had forgiven him. Mrs. Hanna finally felt better, and was able to go on with her life. The man in prison had been a bitter, alienated, hateful person—until he received the Bible and Mrs. Hanna’s message. He cried tears of repentance, and said that if the mother of his murder victim could forgive him, it was possible for him to believe that God would forgive him, too. The experience changed his life, and he began helping other prisoners overcome their own hatred and anger.

Another wonderful example of how mercy can change someone’s life—and perhaps even the course of history—involves a Jewish prisoner in a Siberian work camp after World War II. Under the old Soviet Union, millions of people were unjustly arrested and sent to the camps, and many of them died there. As a surgeon, Dr. Boris Kornfeld—who had been wrongfully convicted—treated both guards and fellow prisoners; while there, he met a Christian whose quiet, unshakeable faith moved him deeply, and he learned the Our Father from him. One day Dr. Kornfeld was repairing a guard’s artery, cut in a knifing, when it occurred to him that he could suture it in such a way that the man—a symbol of the evil prison camp system—would bleed to death a short time later. However, he immediately realized that doing this would mean evil had triumphed in his own heart. Horrified by this self-realization, Dr. Kornfeld began praying over and over the words he had learned in the Our Father: “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” After that Dr. Kornfeld resolved always to act in a morally upright way; this included turning in an orderly who had been stealing food from a dying patient—though by doing so, he knew
he was placing his own life in jeopardy. A few days later he examined a patient who had just been operated on for cancer; seeing the man’s spiritual misery and emptiness, Dr. Kornfeld quietly shared his personal story, confessing his secret faith in Christ. That night someone came in and killed Dr. Kornfeld in his sleep, but his testimony lived on—for the prisoner who heard his confession of faith became a Christian. This man’s name was Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, the great Russian author whose heroic witness and powerful writings inspired millions of victims under Soviet tyranny and helped in a small but significant way set the stage for the eventual collapse of Russian Communism.

Very few, if any of us, will ever be involved in a series of events so noble and historic, but we’re all given opportunities to touch someone else by exercising forgiveness—and doing so can have a profound impact on that person’s life. It’s said that when Thomas Edison was working on improving his first light bulb, he handed a finished bulb—which were laboriously made, one at a time—to a young helper at his laboratory, telling him to take it upstairs to the machinery where it would be tested. The boy nervously carried it step by step, but at the last moment dropped it, shattering the bulb. Edison didn’t say anything, other than telling his workers to start over and make another bulb for testing—a process that took 24 hours. When the bulb was completed, the great inventor made a point of having the same boy carry it upstairs—a gesture of forgiveness and trust which may very well have restored the boy’s self-esteem and changed the course of his life.

Lashing out is not as effective at helping people learn from their mistakes and become better persons as is accepting them and giving them another chance. A wonderful illustration of this truth involves some native tribes in South Africa known as the Babemba. When one of their members is accused of doing something seriously wrong, he is taken to the center of the village, and all the tribe members—men, women, and children—form a large circle around him. One at a time, every single person speaks to the individual about all his good points, all his honorable deeds, and every positive thing he had ever said or done. This ceremony—which can last for days—is not complete until every possible good thing about the accused person has been mentioned; then he is welcomed back into the tribe, and life goes on as before—except now the individual feels an overwhelming need to respond to this communal forgiveness by living up to the noble image of himself created by all the other villagers. This is the approach used by a so-called “primitive” tribe—and it offers a wonderful lesson and example for our so-called “civilized” world, in which mercy is often hard to come by.

Sometimes, however, this message sinks in. A heroic Polish priest, Fr. Jerzy Popieluszko, was a leader in the peaceful opposition to that country’s Communist government; in 1984 he was brutally murdered by government thugs. At a prayer vigil in Warsaw the night before his funeral, during the praying of the Our Father, the people did not want to repeat the words “as we forgive those who trespass against us,” but the priest leading the prayer insisted, and finally they did. The spirit of these words was heroically lived out the next day, for a demonstration march took place, in which ten thousand steel workers in hard hats marched past the headquarters of the secret police, chanting “We forgive, we forgive”—just the opposite of the hateful slogans normally chanted on such occasions.
Once two friends were walking in the desert; a serious argument developed, and one slapped the other. Without saying anything, the second man wrote in the sand, “Today my best friend slapped me in the face.” Coming upon an oasis, after drinking and quenching their thirst, they decided to bathe, but the second man—the one who had been slapped—started drowning, only to have the first man rescue him. After recovering from his ordeal, the second man found a piece of flint and on a rock carved the words, “Today my best friend saved my life.” His companion asked him, “Why did you write on sand after I hurt you, and on rock when I saved you?” His friend answered, “When someone hurts us we should write it down on sand so the winds of forgiveness can erase it away—but when someone does us good, we should carve it on stone, where no wind can ever erase it.”

As someone said, “Every person should have a special cemetery plot in which to bury the faults of friends and loved ones.” Not everyone can easily forget after forgiving an offense, but there is a healthy and holy way of handling that memory. The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us, “It is not in our power not to feel or to forget an offense; but the heart that offers itself to the Holy Spirit turns injury into compassion and purifies the memory in transforming the hurt into intercession” (n. 2843). In other words, if we humbly offer the entire painful experience and our memory of it to the Holy Spirit, it can become an occasion of healing and grace.

Along with forgiving others, of course, it’s necessary to be able to forgive ourselves. A seventeen-year-old named George was walking with his dad along a beach one day when they heard a call for help from a swimmer several hundred yards from shore. George, who was an excellent swimmer, wanted to go to the man’s rescue, but his father forbade it, saying, “It’s not our problem; c’mon, let’s go.” The swimmer ended up drowning, and George was tormented by terrible guilt; he knew he should have disobeyed his dad and saved the man, and so he held himself responsible for his death. This guilt stayed with him 41 years, until George had another chance to rescue a drowning person, and did so, without considering the risk to his own life. Guilt can be crippling, and its effects can be significant and long-lasting. The famous psychiatrist Dr. Karl Menninger once claimed that if someone could only convince the patients in his psychiatric hospitals that their sins were forgiven, 75% of them would quickly be cured or freed of their problems.

An important part of the Good News of Jesus Christ is that God is eager to forgive our sins—but only, of course, to the extent that we forgive others, and this is something many people find hard to do. One author offers a program for developing a truly forgiving heart. He suggests: on Sunday forgive yourself; on Monday forgive your family. On Tuesday forgive your friends and associates; on Wednesday forgive across economic lines within your own country. On Thursday forgive across cultural lines, and on Friday across political lines, in your own nation; then, on Saturday, forgive other nations. Imagine how wonderfully our world would be transformed if most people chose to do this. Being merciful can be a glorious experience; even so, many people find it very difficult to forgive. Some years ago a serial killer on death row, using a pen name of Michael Dismas (Dismas being the traditional name of the Good Thief crucified with Jesus), wrote an article for The Priest magazine, in which he shared the horrible background of his life, the story of his conversion, and the lessons he learned about repentance and forgiveness.
According to him, people often don’t want to forgive because they wrongly believe withholding forgiveness provides certain benefits: namely, being able to blame the wrongdoer for our own faults, allowing us to define ourselves as “good” and the other person as “bad,” feeling a sense of power over the other individual, and assuming that a refusal to forgive ensures we won’t be hurt again. As he says, however, these ideas are illusions, and they allow the past to continue haunting us. He also notes that forgiving doesn’t mean forgetting the wrong, for that’s often impossible; it doesn’t let the offender get off “scot-free,” for he or she is still accountable to God; it doesn’t mean pretending everything is all right; and it doesn’t always happen quickly or easily—sometimes it’s a lengthy process, especially when we’ve been badly hurt. Michael Dismas lists instead what forgiveness is: it’s an internal process that only occurs when we want to be healed and be at peace; it’s a sign of positive self-esteem, in which our identity is no longer wrapped up in victimhood; it’s a letting go of the past, so that we no longer allow it to dictate our present and future; it’s a giving up of the desire to punish those who hurt us; and it’s a choice on our part to move on with our lives. These things are all very healthy and necessary. (Michael Dismas, by the way, was executed in 2005—but only after the state and the Church granted his request to take vows as a Benedictine oblate from his prison cell.)

If someone has hurt you, and you find it difficult to forgive, remember that Jesus has forgiven all your own sins many times, but can only continue doing so if you in turn show mercy. Realize that forgiveness isn’t so much a feeling, but a conscious choice on your part—and that if in your heart you say “I forgive him or her,” and continue doing so, the proper feelings will eventually come. If you need to, write a letter to the person, describing how deeply you were hurt and how it made you feel. Pour out all your feelings, but then, instead of sending the letter, burn it—for this is a way of releasing those feelings into the hands of God. Use your imagination, if need be; picture yourself standing in a room with the other person, and with Jesus. See yourself saying, “I forgive you” as Jesus gives you an encouraging and approving smile. If that’s too hard, imagine yourself asking Jesus to forgive in your name, and picture Him turning toward the person and doing so. Lastly, ask yourself “Can I pray for that person?” If you can pray for him or her, that means forgiveness has taken place (though it has to be prayer without any conditions, such as “Dear God, please help her stop being such a selfish jerk,” or “Dear God, instead of him going to hell, I hope he only goes to the worst corner of purgatory and suffers terribly there until Judgment Day”). True forgiveness means praying for the person’s well-being, without conditions, even if you then choose out of prudence to have no further contact with him or her. That’s all right; after all, Jesus commanded us to love our enemies—but He didn’t say we had to continue associating with them or keep on giving them even more chances to hurt us. It’s quite all right to pray for our enemies, and love them, from a safe distance.

Forgiveness is indeed the key to inner freedom and peace. Jesus places this key in the hands of each of His followers, but it must be our decision to use it. These weeks of Lent are not only a time for us to seek the forgiveness of our own sins, but also to make sure we’re not holding a grudge toward anyone who’s sinned against us. Mercy makes all the difference—and if we sincerely and humbly ask for God’s assistance and grace, He’ll help us receive it, live it, and share it.
Forgiveness: The Key to Freedom and Peace

A Definition of Forgiveness
Someone rightly defined forgiveness as “relinquishing my right to hurt back.”

Quotes on Forgiveness
We are most like beasts when we kill.
We are most like men when we judge.
We are most like God when we forgive.
--William Arthur Ward
Forgiveness is man’s deepest need and God’s highest achievement.
--Horace Bushnell
Doing an injury puts you below your enemy; revenging one, makes you even with him; forgiving it sets you above him.
--Benjamin Franklin

The Saints on Forgiveness
If you are suffering from a bad man’s injustice, forgive him—lest there be two bad men.
--St. Augustine
The saints rejoiced at injuries and persecutions, because in forgiving them they had something to present to God when they prayed to Him.
--St. Teresa of Avila
Our friends, then, are all those who unjustly afflict us with trials and ordeals, shame and injustice, sorrows and torments, martyrdom and death; we must love them greatly for we all possess eternal life because of them.
--St. Francis of Assisi

The Catechism on Forgiveness
It is not in our power not to feel or to forget an offense; but the heart that offers itself to the Holy Spirit turns injury into compassion and purifies the memory in transforming the hurt into intercession (n. 2843).

Program for Achieving a Truly Forgiving Heart
Sunday: Forgive yourself.
Monday: Forgive your family.
Tuesday: Forgive your friends and associates.
Wednesday: Forgive across economic lines within your own nation.
Thursday: Forgive across cultural lines within your own nation.
Friday: Forgive across political lines within your own nation.
Saturday: Forgive other nations.

Only the brave know how to forgive. A coward never forgives; it is not in his nature.
--Robert Muller

People Don’t Want to Forgive Because
they wrongly believe refusing to forgive allows them to . . . blame the wrongdoer for their own faults . . . define themselves as “good” and the other person as “bad” . . . feel a sense of power over the one who hurt them . . . and supposedly prevent themselves from being hurt again.

Forgiveness Doesn’t Mean
forgetting the wrong, for that’s almost impossible . . . letting the offender get off “scot-free,” for he or she is still accountable to God . . . pretending everything is all right, for that isn’t true . . . an event that happens quickly or easily, for often it takes a long time.

Forgiveness Is
an internal process that occurs when we want to be healed and at peace . . . a sign of positive self-esteem . . . a letting-go of the past . . . giving up the desire to punish the one who hurt us . . . a choice to move on with our lives.
--Michael Dismas
What Does God Do With Our Sins?
--He lays them on His Son, Jesus Christ (Isaiah 53:6).
--Christ takes them away (John 1:29).
--They are removed an immeasurable distance from us—as far as the East is from the West (Psalm 123:12).
--When sought for, they are not found (Jeremiah 50:20).
--The Lord forgives them (Ephesians 1:7).
--He cleanses them all away by the Blood of His Son (1 John 1:7).
--He cleanses them as white as snow or wool (Isaiah 1:18; Psalm 51:7).
--He abundantly pardons them (Isaiah 55:7).
--He tramples them underfoot (Micah 7:19).
--He remembers them no more (Hebrews 10:17).
--He casts them behind His back (Isaiah 38:17).
--He casts them into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19).
--He will not impute us with them (Romans 4:8).
--He covers them (Romans 4:7).
--He blots them out (Isaiah 43:25).
--He blots them out as a thick cloud (Isaiah 44:22).
--He blots out even the proof against us, nailing it to His Son’s Cross (Colossians 2:14).

--Rosalind Goforth

More Quotes on Forgiveness
A Christian will find it cheaper to pardon than to resent. Forgiveness saves the expense of anger, the cost of hatred, the waste of spirits.

--Hannah More

The sin of unforgiveness is a cancer that destroys relationships, eats away at one’s own psyche, and—worst of all—shuts us off from God’s grace.

--Robertson McQuilkin

A Poem on Forgiveness

Beginning Anew

He came to my desk with quivering lip;
The lesson was done . . .
“Have you a new leaf [sheet] for me,
dear Teacher,
I have spoiled this one!”
I took his leaf, all soiled and blotted,
And gave him a new one, all unspotted;
Then into his tired heart I smiled:
“Do better now, my child!”

I went to the throne with trembling heart;
The day was done.
“Have you a new day for me,
dear Master?
I have spoiled this one!”
He took my day, all soiled and blotted,
And gave me a new one, all unspotted;
Then into my tired heart He smiled:
“Do better now, my child!”

--Kathleen Wheeler

Decide to Forgive
Decide to forgive
For resentment is negative
Resentment is poisonous
Resentment diminishes and devours the self.
Be the first to forgive,
To smile and take the first step.
And you will see happiness bloom
On the face of your human brother or sister.
Be always the first;
Do not wait for others to forgive,
For by forgiving
You become the master of fate,
The fashioner of life,
The doer of miracles.
To forgive is the highest,
Most beautiful,
Form of love.
In return you will receive
Untold peace and happiness.

--Anonymous