

*Monday Adoration: June 23, 2008*  
*By Fr. Callistus Isara, MSP*

## The Lord's Prayer (4)

Preamble: The second petition of the *Lord's Prayer* is on forgiveness. Our Lord knows that we would always need forgiveness because of our sinful nature. I have treated *Forgiveness in the Christian Life* twice at our monthly *Desert Day of Prayer* and it invoked a deep, passionate, and emotional reaction from participants. I feel Divine Providence has brought us to treat again this important topic. How come that we find it difficult to forgive? What should we do when people hurt us? At times, we battle within ourselves whether to forgive or not. The *Lord's Prayer* invites us to forgive as God has forgiven us.

Matthew 6:12: "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive those who are in debt to us."

Immediately after asking for food, our daily bread, our Lord taught us to ask for forgiveness. Just as we eat every day, we commit sin every day hence we should ask for forgiveness. The truth is that the Lord always forgives us whenever we show true sorrow for our sins. Our Lord never turns us back when we ask for forgiveness no matter how grievous our sins may be. Thus, forgiveness is central and indispensable in the Christian life. Our liturgy shows our regular request for God's forgiveness: first during the *penitential rite*, during the *Our Father*, during the *Lamb of God*. And before receiving holy communion we say, "Lord, I am not worthy to receive us....." We know that if the Lord were to treat us according our sins, not many of us will make it. According to the Psalmist, "If you O Lord should mark our guilt, Lord we would survive?" (Ps 130:3). God would fulfill His part by forgiving us because He is always faithful and merciful. The *onus* is on us whether we would be faithful to our part of the *Lord's Prayer* in which we pledge to forgive as God has forgiven us. Luke's version has it: "for we ourselves forgive each one who is in debt to us" (Lk 11:4).

### Forgiveness as a Command

The precept of forgiveness is a command. It is not an optional precept. That means no matter how long it takes, we must strive and work towards the path of forgiveness. Anything else is contradictory to the Christian life. The *Lord's Prayer* reveals that we hinder our path to forgiveness if we persistently refuse to forgive others. I wish to recall my remarks in the paper, *Forgiveness in the Christian Life (2)*: "The prayer for forgiveness is somewhat frightening because it shows that the Lord will forgive us in proportion to how we forgive others. It shows that human forgiveness and Divine forgiveness are intertwined. Thus a Christian should not say, 'I will never forgive him/her for what he/she has done to me.' If we really mean the prayer for forgiveness in the *Our Father*, there would be times that we would not be bold enough to pray it."

Our Lord further enjoins us immediately after teaching His disciples the *Our Father*: "Yes, if you forgive others their failings, your heavenly Father will forgive you yours; but if you do not forgive others, your Father will not forgive your failings either" (Mt 6:14-15). Some other texts on forgiveness in the NT include:

- “Bear with one another; forgive each other if one of you has a complaint against another. The Lord has forgiven us; now you must do the same” (Col 3:13).
- “Forgive and you will be forgiven” (Lk 6:37)
- “Be generous to one another, sympathetic, forgiving each other as readily as God forgave you in Christ” (Eph 4:32).

### Jesus, the Model of Forgiveness

Jesus Christ is the perfect model for all Christians. As Christians we follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Our Lord Jesus practiced to the fullest whatever He commanded us. Whether it is carrying the cross, loving others, showing mercy to others, caring for the poor and the sick, welcoming and accommodating sinners etc, our Lord Jesus is a perfect example of what he demands from us. Where else can we find an example of forgiveness if not from our Lord Himself? Our Lord forgave the adulterous woman her sins (Jn 8:1-11); he called sinners to follow him (Mt 9:9-13); he allowed a sinful woman to kiss him and wipe his feet with her hair (Lk 7:36-50), and so on. But on the cross, our Lord forgave those who killed him: “Father, forgive them; they not know what they are doing” (Lk 23:34). Our Lord opened the gates of paradise to the *good thief* who was crucified with him. He said to Jesus, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom’ (Lk 23:42). Jesus said to him in reply: “In truth I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Lk 23:43). Stephen, the first martyr, followed the example of our Lord by forgiving those who stoned him to death: “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Acts 7:60).

### Forgiveness: A Challenge to the Christian Life

From what has been said above, the call to forgiveness is a great challenge for Christians. It is a challenge that we will rise up to through prayer, reflection, disposition to forgive, visit to the Blessed Sacrament, willingness to go through the difficult process of forgiveness, etc. If we go down on our knees and ask God for the grace to forgive those who hurt us, the good Lord will give us that grace. It is understandable when we find it difficult to forgive but let us realize that it is not impossible because with God all things are possible (Mt 19:26). What hurt from others can ever compare to what Christ endured? Jesus suffered worse things and yet he forgave all especially those who killed him. Forgiveness ushers in freedom, grace, and union with Christ. As I once noted, “to forgive those who offend me benefits me more than those who offended me.” I become a stronger and better Christian if I forgive because I become more like Christ. As Fr. Thomas Pazhayampallil has remarked, “To forgive is a sign of greatness. Forgiveness implies love. Christian love seeks the good of others no matter what they do to us, no matter how they treat us” (**Words of Eternal Life. Vol. 1, p. 1186**).

**Conclusion:** As Christians, we will never lack the grace of the Holy Spirit. That should be a source of our faith and trust in God in the midst of struggles, difficulties, temptations and weaknesses which we meet in our spiritual path. May God give us the grace to forgive and let go of the harm done to us! *Amen!*