



Seek First the Kingdom

Parents in Partnership with God – Sharing Faith with Children

A Ministry of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Immaculata, Pennsylvania

PARENT ADVICE FROM POPE FRANCIS -- PART 5 of 6

The Joy of Love (Apostolic Exhortation), Chapter 4: "Love in Marriage"

In Chapter four of *The Joy of Love* Pope Francis tutors us on what love looks like in marriage. He reflects on the various elements that St. Paul included in the "love homily" that he wrote to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 13: 4-7). For each of twelve love elements Pope Francis wrote two paragraphs. But for LOVE FORGIVES, he wrote four paragraphs. That ought to tell us something! In this Year of Mercy let us reflect on the quality of forgiveness.

LOVE FORGIVES

Hurts come from varied sources. We feel left out, betrayed, cheated, overlooked, wrongly accused, discounted, violated, ignored, put-down, embarrassed, ridiculed, disrespected, used or bullied. Because egos are fragile these slights fuel anger, defensiveness, standoffs, shutdowns, shutouts, and retaliation. *"Once we allow ill will to take root in our hearts, it leads to deep resentment."* (#105)

"The opposite of resentment is forgiveness, which is rooted in a positive attitude that seeks to understand other people's weaknesses and to excuse them." (#105). Forgiveness is a proactive freedom to "let go" of the offense rather than ruminate over it. Admit that someone offended you, name it for what it is, do not condone it but make a decision to grow beyond it and release the negative emotions associated with the person or event.

"Something is wrong when we see every problem as equally serious; in this way, we risk being unduly harsh with the failings of others." (#105). Let's face it! The only time anyone does hurtful things is when they are hurting. Let yourself wonder what is going on in the life of the offender. Pray for that person.

Parent Ponder-Points:

- On days that we are in a good mood and rested we react differently to stimulus than we do on a day when we are irritable. Establish good sleep routines and nutrition habits.
- We each have tender pressure points that make us more sensitive to feel hurt in situations that do not offend other people. Grow to know yourself and use self-talk when tempted to anger. Name, claim, and tame your emotions.
- Reverse roles. Put yourself in the shoes of the offender. What do you think is the reason behind his/her behavior? Rather than take it personally, consider the behavior as his/her struggle. Let that insight lead to compassion within you.

Reflection Questions:

1. When do you find it easy to forgive; when is it most difficult?
2. Where in your life do you need the grace of forgiveness?
3. Read *The Joy of Love*, # 105-108. What thought(s) most tutor your heart today?

LOVE FORGETS

Surely we have all heard the expression, “Forgive and forget” or “I can forgive but I will never forget!” The first expression requires thoughtful interpretation lest we mistakenly conclude that brainwashing is a component of forgiveness. The second expression fails to recognize that it is the essence of forgiveness to release the hurt from our memories.

When we ruminate over hurt and continue to hold onto anger we stop smiling and laughing. We cease to see the world around us with optimism. We isolate ourselves. We go into a pity world of one. We exist in an inner world of “I’ll show you!” or “I’ll get even with you!” or “I’ll make you pay!” or “You’ll be sorry!” By this kind of thinking we continue to hurt ourselves. We damage ourselves emotionally, psychologically, and even physically. Anger affects health.

Unforgiveness destroys family life. *“Family communion can only be preserved and perfected through a great spirit of sacrifice. It requires, in fact, a ready and generous openness of each and all to understanding, to forbearance, to pardon, to reconciliation” (#106). . . We need to learn to pray over our past history, to accept ourselves, to learn how to live with our limitations, and even to forgive ourselves” (#107).*

Parent Ponder-Points:

- Whenever anger/hurt surfaces pay a mantra like: “Father, forgive them. They don’t know what they are doing” or “Father, forgive my trespasses as I forgive his/her’s.”
- Use a Prayer Bowl to put before God a hurtful person or situation over which you have no control. Write the situation on paper, place it in the bowl, and ask God for the grace needed. Then “let go” of the situation.
- Each time you think of the offender slowly and thoughtfully pray this personalized version of the Our Father. (Example = Sue)

Sue’s Father who are in heaven. Hallowed be your name in Sue. Your kingdom come in Sue. Your will be done in Sue on earth as it is in heaven. Give Sue this day her daily bread and forgive Sue her trespasses as she forgives those who trespass against her. And lead Sue not into temptation but deliver Sue from evil. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory. Amen.

Reflection Questions:

1. What practice do you have to help you “let go of” (forget) hurts?
2. What do you suspect will happen within you if you pray the personalized version of the Our Father for someone who has wounded you?
3. Read *The Joy of Love*, # 107. What is something within yourself that needs forgiveness?