

When People Don't Forgive (Abbot Tryphon)

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There are people who insist on holding on to resentment, often inventing situations in their minds that never happened, justifying their bad behavior, and putting the blame on others. They see themselves as the abused party, always quick to take offense. Rarely are they able to have healthy relationships, for they are in reality, the abusers. Their world centers around them, and any attempt by others to appease them, only contributes to the anti-social behavior.

Such behavior betrays a deep spiritual and psychological illness, one that is not easily healed. Such people feel empowered by making other people uncomfortable, and normal attempts at rapprochement often end in failure, for such people are always looking for ways to continue their control over others. Their illness is difficult to heal, for their pride and deep seated sense of superiority makes repentance difficult, for they simply don't see themselves as having a problem.

The cure for the illness of the soul is to be found in the life of the Church, where Her sacred mysteries (the sacraments), Her scriptures, and Her divine services, are the source for the healing that the heart so craves. Forgiveness Sunday Vespers is

but one of the sources that can begin the process of healing, for it is during this service that the faithful, one by one, speak the words, «Please forgive me for any hurt or offense I have caused you in any way».

The response, «God forgives. Please forgive me for any hurt or offense I have caused you in any way», exemplifies the Church's teaching that we can only forgive others if we have Christ in us, for it is Christ Who gives us the power to forgive. Since God forgives us, we, too, can forgive.

One of the Desert Fathers tells us of a young monk who came to his elder, complaining that he'd been wronged by one of his brothers, and following the holy tradition of the desert, had gone to the one who had wronged him, asking for forgiveness. The erring brother refused, so the wronged brother wanted to know what he should do in response. The elder told the young monk that he had walked away justified in the eyes of God, and that there was nothing left for him to do, except to pray for his erring brother.

This true story from the Desert Fathers makes clear that we must always be quick to forgive others, even if they were at fault, not remembering the wrong done to us, nor depend on the other cooperating in the reconciliation. Their repentance is not required, for we will be held accountable only for our own response. Before God, we will be justified.

When another person refuses to accept our heartfelt apology, we must be willing to let it be, and walk away, knowing that we've done our part. Abusive people such as these, can, if we let them, prevent us from living our own life in Christ, for they keep our focus away from the forgiveness that comes from Christ. When we walk away from such negative people, we walk away having forgiven them, and we commit ourselves to praying for their repentance. There is nothing more we can do.

Keeping our focus on Christ, we do not react, do not resent, and do not lose our inner peace. The sickness that is at the basis of controlling, abusive people, must not be allowed to take away from the inner joy and peace that comes from our personal relationship with Christ.

For your own soul's sake, and for the soul of the abuser, continue to pray for them, but go your own way, "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7)."

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