

Forgiving someone

So then, if you are bringing your offering to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first, and then come back and present your offering. Come to terms with your opponent in good time while you are still on the way to the court with him.

(Mt.5: 23-25)

From the writings of Henri J.M. Nouwen:

We are all wounded people. Who wounds us? Often those whom we love and those who love us. When we feel rejected, abandoned, abused, manipulated, or violated, it is mostly by people very close to us: our parents, our friends, our spouses, our lovers, our children, our neighbours, our teachers, our pastors. Those who love us wound us too. That's the tragedy of our lives. This is what makes forgiveness from the heart so difficult. It is precisely our hearts that are wounded. We cry out, "You, who I expected to be there for me, you have abandoned me. How can I ever forgive you for that?"

Forgiveness often seems impossible, but nothing is impossible for God. The God who lives within us will give us the grace to go beyond our wounded selves.

The first thing we are called to do when we think of others as our enemies is to pray for them. This is certainly not easy. It requires discipline to allow those who hate us or those toward whom we have hostile feelings to come into the intimate centre of our hearts. Praying for our enemies is therefore a real event, the event of reconciliation. It is impossible to lift our enemies up in the presence of God and at the same time continue to hate them.

Forgiveness is the name of love practised among people who love poorly. The hard truth is that all of us love poorly. We do not even know what we are doing when we hurt others. We need to forgive and be forgiven every day, every hour – unceasingly.

Therefore we, ourselves, also have to beg forgiveness. The older we become, the more clearly we see that we, too, have wounded others deeply, and are part of a society of violence and destruction.

For reflection:

Think of someone that needs your forgiveness ... Why do I allow him/her to have so much power over my feelings and emotions? Why can't I simply be grateful for the good s/he did and forget about his/her failures and mistakes? Speak to God about this...

Now try to pray for this person ... If it's difficult to pray for him/her, ask God the grace "to go beyond your wounded self" and to soften your heart.