

Make February your forgiveness month

In Matthew's Gospel, there is a short conversation between the Apostle Peter and Jesus (Matthew 18:21-22). Peter asks, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus' response to him is, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times."

Seventy-seven times! That's quite a challenge, don't you think?

I'm confident that every person reading this reflection has suffered in some way because of what another person has said or done to them. In our interactions with family members, work colleagues and family friends, it is not uncommon for tensions to rise and for hurtful words to be spoken. In the brokenness of life, too, it is not surprising that stress, excessive drinking, gambling, violence and other addictions will impact relationships in a negative way.

As you read these words, maybe you are carrying the painful burden of someone who has hurt you. This hurt may be from years or even decades ago, or it might be something you are living through right now. The burden of hurt can eat away at our lives and, for some people, can cause great emotional, mental and physical stress.

If you find yourself in this situation, how do you hear Jesus' words to Peter? Do you think, well, that's okay for Jesus, but I'm a mere mortal and forgiveness doesn't come that easy when you've been hurt so painfully. Sometimes withholding forgiveness – especially when the perpetrator of the pain deeply desires it – can be a subtle form of punishment. There can be a sense of, "well that person hurt me so now I will hurt that person by not forgiving them".

Is any of this familiar to you? Is there a part of you that recognises that by holding onto the hurt and not forgiving it's not making you feel any better? It's like an internal seed of bitterness that keeps growing the more you keep refusing to forgive.

In my own reflections on forgiveness, I have been inspired by those who have chosen to forgive in the most amazing ways and in the most tragic of circumstances. For example, this month marks the third anniversary of the death of four young children who were hit by a motorist. The parents of three of the children, Danny and Leila Abdallah, while believing justice needed to be served on the driver, offered to him their forgiveness. And, out of their pain, the [i4Give Day](#) movement has grown – calling all people to forgive or ask for forgiveness.

Why did they do this and how did they find the courage to do it? I don't pretend to know their minds, but I sense they know Jesus' message of forgiveness deep within their hearts, and they know there is no chance of peace when unforgiveness becomes all-consuming.

Later this month, Catholics will begin the season of Lent. During this time, we think about those areas of our lives where we have failed. I can think of no better way than to reflect – and act – on my need to forgive. How about you?

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