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Audio of Prelate: Forgiving offenses

In this month's podcast, Bishop Javier Echevarria offers reflections on another spiritual work of mercy. "Our Lord's Cross helps us understand that we are all in need of forgiveness: to forgive and to be forgiven."

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Translation of the Prelate's audio recording is found below.

To listen to the 10-minute audio in Spanish click here.

One of the works of mercy that the world most needs, now and always, is *forgiving offenses*. “At times how

hard it seems to forgive!” the Holy Father said. “And yet pardon is the instrument placed into our fragile hands to attain serenity of heart. To let go of anger, wrath, violence and revenge are necessary conditions to living joyfully.”

Living joyfully is a desire harbored by all men and women. But no one can attain happiness on their own, turning their back on God and others. Not infrequently, we could have the impression that those around us are an obstacle for us: because they offend us; because they mistreat us; because they cause us physical or moral pain—evils that Christ himself experienced, crucified by those He had come to save.

Our Lord, the visible face of the Father’s mercy, forgave without giving way to resentment. “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do,” he prayed as he hung from

the wood of the Cross. Thus he decisively broke the vicious circle of hate that only generates more hate, the circle of vengeance and resentment. And He brought it about that from that Cross there would flow forth a stream of mercy, able to change the history of every woman and man.

Our Lord's Cross helps us understand that we are all in need of forgiveness: to forgive and to be forgiven. Whoever does not accept this reality becomes unable to fathom the marvelous depth of the love that unites us to another person and to God.

Let's review the parable of the prodigal son. The young man, blinded by inexperience and pride, turns away from his father's house and squanders everything he had received. If he returns home, it's due to the fact that he had experienced

closely, on previous occasions, his father's mercy, his understanding, and knew very well that he wouldn't be rejected. He returns to his father, who with his embrace gives his greatest gift: his forgiveness. And his father does so without humiliating him, without any reminder of his previous warnings and advice. Only then does the young man come to understand the real treasure of his father's love that he had ignored and left behind, and that fortunately, upon coming back contritely, he recovered.

Each of us also needs to go to the sacrament of forgiveness frequently, to understand in some way the depth of divine love. "God never tires of forgiving," the Pope reminds us. "We are the ones who tire of asking for forgiveness." Indeed, unfortunately sometimes we are even determined to grow accustomed to the coldness of sin. So if we already benefit from

this sacrament, let's receive it with the best dispositions we can foster, going more often or preparing better. To achieve this, let us throw ourselves into the merciful arms of God, and radically uproot the prejudices and excuses that can prevent us from perceiving in our soul the caress of our Lord's understanding. Perhaps we fail to remember the happiness we experienced the last time we reconciled with another person? Isn't asking for forgiveness a human gesture capable of "giving a face" to this God of ours, whom so often we separate from our lives and whose goodness we have forgotten?

Many Christians are unaware of the beauty of Confession. Let's have the conviction that this sacrament has not gone out of style and never will. It has and will always have an ever-present power. Moreover, it is a sacrament that opens our lives to the

future, because it restores hope to us. Therefore let us pray that the Jubilee Year of Mercy will allow many Christians to rediscover the path back to the father's house.

Perhaps someone might think that in order to confess, a very complex preparation beforehand is required, and this is not the case. It's enough to desire grace, to make a good examination of conscience (perhaps with the help of a written guide or someone who can provide assistance), and then going trustingly to the priest. Let's not overlook the fact that it was his interior and exterior sufferings, knowledge of his personal misery and the memory of his father's love that interiorly moved the prodigal son to set out for home. Many people around us are in a similar situation. They just need someone to accompany them on the journey back to the Father's house.

Moreover, just as God forgives so should we forgive others as many times as necessary in our daily life. Perhaps because of misunderstandings, personality differences, political or cultural divergences or other issues, some people hold on for years to the memory of the offenses caused by friends or third parties.

Unfortunately, with a disposition like this in the soul, conflicts can last much longer, with each side refusing to budge.

Fully immersed as we are in the Year of Mercy, have we discovered this time as a great opportunity to offer reconciliation, including when we are the offended ones? Our Lord always takes the first step to forgive, even when we do not deserve his grace. Have we truly decided to follow the Master's example? "Force yourself, if necessary," wrote St. Josemaría, "always to forgive those

who offend you, from the very first moment. For the greatest injury or offence that you can suffer from them is as nothing compared with what God has pardoned you.”

May we have a strong desire that the decision to forgive and to ask for forgiveness become our habitual attitude, in each family and among friends. Let us realize that without the willingness to forgive, all the different settings of our lives, including our own family, turn into desolate and selfish environments that poison and sadden souls. Christ’s lesson is very clear: to love untiringly, including those who hurt us.

Therefore, if the others respond to our offer of forgiveness, let us give thanks to God. But when we do not get the response that we would have liked, let us not get discouraged, because mercy is free and does not

expect anything in return. Jesus died praying for those who crucified and offended him. His redemptive death was what caused the veil of hatred to fall from the eyes of souls. And only then, in contemplating Christ's death, did the centurion standing at the foot of the Cross utter this beautiful act of faith: "Truly this man was the Son of God."

If Christians readily forgive offenses received, with joy and simplicity of heart, many people will be attracted by the love of the children of God, and they will encounter the good Father who wants to embrace everyone with his mercy.