

Extremely difficult to Forgive

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Sometimes, it is funny when we hear people not speaking to each other. Most times it is very sad. It is said, for instance, when colleagues at work pass each other in stony silence. It is sad, too, when close neighbours or long-time friends are set on avoiding each other's company. But it is tragic when members of the same family become not speaking. The pain goes deeper and often lasts longer. It is said: *angry words hurt and angry silence wounds.*

Of course all of us are vulnerable, the strong as well as the weak. Any stranger can bruise us; any friend can break us. Our frail defences can be pierced by many sharp blades – slighted dignity, rights denied, confidences betrayed, promises broken, achievements ignored. Time may help us absorb the pain but only love can help us to absolve the offence.

Sadly, there are times when the gentle impulse of forgiveness stirs in our hearts, only to be stifled immediately by fear. We hesitate to make the first move for fear of being rejected, or being hurt again, or being taken for a fool. At other times, the impulse to forgive is not felt at all. This can happen especially when we have been hurt by the suffering of those who are close to us; when, say, a friend or relative is the innocent victim of heartless cruelty. The hurt can go so deep that it damages our inner freedom and makes forgiveness seem like betrayal.

But whether our hurts are great or small, God's healing grace is always there for us. We can choose to accept or reject it, to walk in freedom or to limp in chains. We can continue to feed our anger and withhold forgiveness. Or we can listen to the voice of God calling us to reach out in love, even to those who treat us badly. It is a call that comes to us from the Cross: from the crucified Jesus, rejected by his own people, who refuses the false comfort of revenge and utters the most generous words ever spoken: *'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.'*