

To err is human; to forgive, divine by Fr. Peter DeSousa

Because we are all human beings, we can expect to make mistakes and at times slip back into selfish and sinful behaviour. Some of us may have rather poor self-control, when we are tired, stressed out or sick. But the other members of the family have a marvellous chance to show us God's forgiving love at such times.

When I was 9 years old, I quarrelled with an older sister and decided not to speak to her again since she was cleverer than me and would always win. My mother who observed this, asked me if I wanted to live as God's child. When I said yes, she told me that God is a forgiving God, and if we want to live as his children, we have to be willing to forgive over and over again.

This made a deep impression on me. I often find it hard to forgive someone who is ungrateful, takes advantage of my kindness, makes use of me or a fool of me. My ego is threatened. "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" is a challenging prayer at such times. Jesus on the cross praying: "Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing," brings me to my senses. In the measure that I forgive, I am forgiven.

I remember my Dad singing to my Mum, after a small tiff: "Let bygones be bygones forever; we'll fall in love, once again." Yes forgiveness is one of the greatest ways of loving and showing that we are Jesus' disciples. Husbands and wives, Parents and children, siblings are very human and all can act rather selfishly at times. Yet as disciples of Jesus, we have no option, but to forgive 70 times 7 times, which is without limit. How do we get this grace? Humble yourself before God and invite the Holy Spirit to soften your hard heart. I know of one couples who would lie prostrate before the Blessed Sacrament and not arise until they were willing to forgive. It took 45 minutes at times, to let go of the other's offence.

In many homes, each one wants to win by making the other lose. I may enjoy being right, dominating the other, taking my revenge, teaching the other a good lesson, for a while. The other will feel resentful. After a while my victory will be short lived too because we are out of relationship. If each one feels listened to and their feelings acknowledged, a solution is often found.

So there are two factors to consider.

- a) the actual problem to be solved and
- b) your relationship.

The second is more important.

- 1) Do not blame the other for your feelings: e.g. "You made me angry". Rather say "I feel upset when you spend more than ... on new clothes, without consulting me."

2) Accept that this is how the other is feeling. Feelings are neither right nor wrong in themselves. Give feedback as follows: "You feel upset when I spend more than on clothes, without consulting you."

When both feel listened to and accepted with respect, it is easier to look at alternatives, weigh the pro's and con's and consider possible solutions.

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There are various ways of dealing with conflict.

- a. Saying nothing but sulking and avoiding the other
- b. abuse or violence
- c. acting the martyr and giving in with disgust or self-pity
- d. manipulating and bribing
- e. compromising (give and take), and
- f. collaborating - working out what is best.

What is your pattern? Share it with your spouse. Everyone of us has a family history where we learned how to deal with anger. Free yourself from the past and choose to modify your behaviour with the help of the Holy Spirit.

What are some areas where there is conflict and how can you resolve it? Agree on some ground rules of what is acceptable in your family. e.g. Using the phone. Bathroom occupation. Watching TV. Meal attendance. Noise level. Bed time.

Have regular times for reconciliation, resolving conflicts, listening, sharing and praying together before making major decisions. One family chose Fridays before dinner, when they reflected together on Jesus on the cross forgiving us. Alternately, read and reflect together as a family on Lk 15:11-32 or Mt 5: 1-12.

When we reflect back on our own personal history, we may recall past hurts that are still not resolved and bring back buried feelings of resentment, hatred or anger.

- a. Bring Jesus into that situation and see yourself through his eyes. Allow him to love, comfort, strengthen and provide you with what you needed at that moment.
- b. See those who hurt you through Jesus' eyes. Maybe Jesus was angry at the way they treated you and takes a whip to drive them out of the temple of your body or spirit, which they violated. But place them also under his cross and hear him praying to Abba Father to forgive them. Let his precious blood flow over them and over you.
- c. Choose to consciously give up your resentment, fear, anxiety, shame, revenge or hatred. Cast it out from you with the power of the Holy Spirit.
- d. Ask the Holy Spirit to fill those vacated areas of your life with love, joy, peace, kindness, gentleness, patience, praise and thanksgiving. Then those painful memories from your past are healed and you are free to love and forgive, as Jesus' disciples.

Married couples can do this prayer exercise with each other and take the part of Jesus to each other in listening, responding, embracing and healing the other. For this is the meaning of your sacramental relationship, to redeem and heal your spouse. The best place to do this is in your bed-room.

Jesus wants you to listen, share, forgive and heal each other through his precious blood and his healing, life-giving spirit.

Parents can also heal their children by inviting them to come and lie down between them and share their hurts and frustrations. Silently listen to their feelings without defensiveness.

Ask forgiveness if you have hurt them. Give forgiveness if they have hurt you. Help them to give up what negativity they are clinging on to and ask God's spirit to fill them with new life. Friends of mine healed their 31 year old son in this way. Try it. It really works. God gives you the grace to be life-giving to your children, not only in conceiving them, but always. Parents.