

Forgiveness  
September 11, 2011

Forgiveness is not an easy thing to do...but, as disciples and followers of Christ...men and women on the road to holiness and to becoming saints...can we find it in our hearts to forgive another who has hurts us...who has wronged us either personally or who has wronged our family or friends?

I think most of us would remember exactly where we were and what we were doing 10 years ago on 9/11.

I was in college at The Ohio State University...getting ready to start my second to last year.

Classes had not yet started at that point, so I was getting ready to go out and do some school shopping for supplies.

I remember my roommate telling me that some planes had flown into the Twin Towers in New York.

At first, I didn't believe him...he was a bit of a jokester...I had to turn the T.V. on and see for myself.

I couldn't believe it! I just sat there and watched in utter shock as the day unfolded.

I also remember hearing that other cities in the United States might be targeted as well...and I lived in the capital of Ohio – Columbus – a major city...well, at least it seemed to be a major city to me at that time.

So, naturally, I was a bit worried.

I remember around 12:00 noon, I got a call from my mom seeing if I was alright...where I was...if I was safe...all the things that mom's would be concerned about.

After assuring her I was indeed alright and telling her I love her, I actually went on my business of going out and trying to do some shopping for the new school year.

I remember days, weeks, months, and even years later, the flurry of emotions surrounding that day that changed how we live in the world forever.

There were feelings of sadness for the innocent who died.

There were feelings of terror and fear wondering if and when the next attack would be and where.

There were feelings of anger towards those who were responsible for the horrific tragedy.

All sorts of feelings...except forgiveness...forgiveness might have been preached in churches, but was far from being practiced, even for myself.

I remember wanting revenge like so many other people and so, I bought into all the country songs that promoted getting even.

I bought into our government wanting to go over and destroy those who hurt us and our country.

I bought into it all because I was angry like so many other people.

Looking back on this, was anger the proper response...was it justified?

Well, according to St. Thomas Aquinas, if one is angry because an injustice is committed, then, YES, anger is the proper response. And an injustice was definitely committed against the United States. Almost 3,000 people – innocent people – lost their lives on that day... men, women, and children.

If this isn't an injustice, I don't know what is.

And so, anger is the right response when injustice happens.

The question though is...what are we supposed to do with this anger?

Are we to hold onto it, let it build up, and fuel our possible revenge?

Well...not exactly.

Rather, as disciples and followers of Christ, our anger should help us and lead us to eventually...forgiveness.

Remember some of Christ's last words on the cross, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do."

Our Lord asked for forgiveness while dying on the cross for those who put him there...for those who nailed him to it.

And if we are called to imitate Christ in word and in deed, then we too are called to try to ask for forgiveness for those who have hurt us as well...and this is not easy, of course.

Nonetheless, we are called to try to forgive.

So, what does it mean to forgive?

First, forgiveness is not a willful ignorance...it is not "just forgetting about something."

We are not called to be blind...we are to remember, always remember so that we may learn and hopefully find healing someday.

Forgiveness is wanting to bring the other person back into right relationship with yourself, with God, and with the community. And this particular forgiveness needs to be rooted in love...love for the other person and for their soul and for their salvation. We don't have to like the other person...that's different. We are called to love one another though...especially our enemies... because that's what separates us from sinners. Anyone can love their friends...but, can we love not only our friends, but also our enemies? So, forgiveness is wanting justice and peace when a wrong has been committed...and is wanting this out of love for the other. So, can we find it in our hearts to forgive another who has hurt us... who has wronged us either personally or our family or friends? As we reflect on this, I leave you with a quote from St. Josemarie Escriva about forgiveness...

*“Force yourself, if necessary, always to forgive those who offend you, from the very first moment. For the greatest injury or offense that you can suffer from them is as nothing compared with what God has pardoned you.”*

In other words, always forgive another because the harm they have done us doesn't even come close to comparison for the harm that we might have done towards God...a harm that has been forgiven time and time again. So, we are to try our best to always forgive one another.