

## **Forgiveness: The Summit of Love**

By Bishop Victor Galeone

The most difficult thing that the Lord asks of his followers is to forgive - that is, to give up my right to hurt you for having hurt me. The following example of forgiveness so moved me some years ago that I recorded it in my journal. I share it with you for your edification and imitation.

February 5, 1990: Today I buried a saint named Catherine Wilson. Since I've been here as pastor for only a short time, I didn't get to meet Catherine until a visit to the local hospital in December. Even though she had a malignant tumor removed, her only concern was to resume her visits to the VA Hospital, where she had volunteered for over 30 years. She informed me that she had been awarded a bronze plaque for 20,000 volunteer hours! Now at 86, she was ever so eager to return to "her boys," as she called them.

At that point, I remarked, "What fine Catholic parents you must have had, Catherine, to have raised a daughter like you!" She chuckled as she replied, "Father, I'm a convert to the faith, and my mother was quite prejudiced against Catholics." I prompted her, "Quite prejudiced...?"

She went on to describe the relationship with her mother. When Catherine graduated from college, the family moved to a new neighborhood. After worshipping for a few weeks at a nearby church where she found the preaching dull, Catherine informed her parents that she was going church-shopping. When she selected the Episcopal Church, her mother remarked, "Well, OK - just so it's not a Catholic Church."

Catherine then recounted how she became very fond of Carl Wilson, a coworker in her office - "Father Victor, the finest soul that God ever created. There was just one problem - he was Catholic."

They dated secretly, fell in love, and became engaged - an engagement that lasted for years because Catherine did not want to offend her mother. Meanwhile, she herself became a Catholic.

When she finally informed her mother that she planned to marry Carl in a Catholic ceremony, her mother gave her three days to vacate the house. Preparing for the move, Catherine went to her hope chest in order to wrap the porcelain set of china that she had purchased over several years - one piece per month. On opening the chest, she found every last piece of china reduced to shards.

Then began a four year odyssey during which Catherine sent her mother a card for Christmas, Mother's Day, and her mother's birthday. Each time, the cards were returned unopened, with the envelope stamped, "Return to sender - Refused by addressee." On the same three occasions Catherine also hand-delivered a gift, which she had to leave on the porch, since her mother would not answer the door.

I interrupted: "Catherine, if your cards were being returned to you unopened, what do you think was happening to your gifts?" - "More than likely, they were being tossed in the trash can, unopened." - "And you still delivered them?" - "Father, my mother may have rejected me, but I wanted to let her know that I could never reject her. She was still my mother; and God commanded us, "Honor your father and your mother."

Four long years of being rebuffed, yet she continued to reach out in love. Meanwhile, her father maintained regular contact with Catherine by calling her while she was at work. Then one Sunday afternoon, while Carl was playing golf, her father arrived unannounced and said, "Catherine, let's go for a little ride."

It was back to the old homestead. Because of her hesitation, her father encouraged her, "Come on, let's go inside." Catherine continued: "Once inside the door, I detected the aroma of my favorite meal from childhood - sour beef and dumplings. Mother entered from the kitchen, wrapped her arms around me, and with tears streaming down her face, exclaimed, "Catherine, darling, please forgive me for the terrible way I've been treating you all these years!"

Lord, if either of my parents had treated me the way Catherine was treated, for one year I might have done what she did - perhaps! I would have reasoned: "Look, I've done my part. She's the one at fault! Oh, I'll still pray for her - but why waste more time and money on her?"

Yes, Jesus, today I buried a saint. She learned the lesson that you taught so much better than I - even after all my years as a priest. Turning the other cheek, she repaid rejection with love! Catherine, dear sister, may you now rest in peace!