

“Forgive my mortal foe, nor ever strike him blow for blow. For all the souls on earth that live, to be forgiven must forgive, forgive seventy times seven; For all the blessed souls in heaven are both forgivers and forgiven.”

Corrie ten Boom lived in Amsterdam during World War II. Her father ran a watch repair shop in a nice neighborhood. When the Nazi's occupied the Netherlands, her and her family harbored Jews who were being systematically hunted down and taken to the concentration camps. Eventually someone turned her family in and they were transported to the camps. Corrie and her sister were taken to Ravensbruck camp.

When the camps were liberated, Corrie was the only one from her family to walk out alive. After the war she traveled all over the world lecturing on forgiveness and reconciliation. But there was one speaking engagement that tested even her resolve to forgive. In Munich Germany after her talk a gentleman approached who wanted to thank her for her presentation. As he reached out his hand to shake hers, she looked into the eyes of one of the guards from her time at Ravensbruck. He was the guard who used

to stand duty in the women's showers.

As his hand reached out to her she wasn't able to offer hers back. The horror of the ordeal came back in a flash and she was filled with a cold wave of resentment. This reaction even surprised her as she had just given a lecture on the need for forgiveness and reconciliation. Here she was unable to practice what she preached. That experience begs the question: What do you do if you find yourself in a situation where you cannot forgive another individual?

It is ironic that we face this question during the week that we commemorate the 16th anniversary of 9-11. When Pope Benedict visited Ground Zero during his visit to the United States in 2008, he offered this prayer:

“We ask you in your compassion to bring healing to those who because of their presence here that day suffered from injury and illness. Heal too the families and all those who lost loved ones in this tragedy. Give them strength to continue their lives with courage and hope.”

In this time when we see hatred in Charlottesville and other communities and revenge still smolders beneath the surface of our society while forgiveness and reconciliation are hard to come by, how do we come to terms with the warnings that are presented in our first reading; warnings that remind us that if we do not forgive our brothers and sisters then what can we expect from the Lord?

In these difficult times the first thing we can do is pray; we need to go to God and ask for the grace needed to forgive those who have hurt us. When Corrie faced that guard in Munich and was unable to shake his hand, her immediate response was to pray and it was then that she received a deep and lasting insight: It is not on our forgiveness that healing in our world hinges but on Christ's'. When Jesus commands us to love our enemies he blesses us with the grace needed for that moment. In our prayer we also need to recall how many times God has forgiven us for our iniquities. Jesus has forgiven us infinitely more than the times we are being asked to forgive others.

Finally, along with prayer we are invited to see our persecutors the way that Jesus saw his, as brothers and sisters who have lost their way. We are reminded of that when we hear again the words that Jesus spoke from the cross on Calvary, “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.”

So in answer to the question of how to handle moments when we are unable to forgive someone; First ask Jesus for the grace to forgive; second, recall how often God has forgiven us and finally see our enemies through the eyes of Christ in a new and more understanding light.

To close I would like to share with you a verse that was found in the clothing of one of the victims at the Ravensbruck Concentration camp, the same camp that Corrie ten Boom survived.

Lord, remember not only those of goodwill, but also those of ill will. But do not remember all the suffering they have inflicted upon us; Instead remember all the fruits we have born because of this suffering ----- our fellowship, our loyalty to one another, our humility, our courage, our generosity, the greatness of heart that has grown from this trouble. When our persecutors come to be judged by you, let all these fruits that we have born be their forgiveness.

