

THE MONK AND THE WOMAN

Two Buddhist monks, on their way to the monastery, found an exceedingly beautiful woman at the river bank. Like them, she wished to cross the river, but the water was too high. So one of the monks lifted her on to his back and carried her across.

His fellow monk was thoroughly scandalized. For two full hours he berated him on his negligence in keeping the Holy Rule: Had he forgotten he was a monk? How did he dare touch a woman? And more, actually carry her across the river? And what would people say? Had he not brought their Holy Religion into disrepute? And so on and so forth.

The offending monk patiently listened to the never ending sermon. Finally he broke in with, "Brother, I dropped that woman at the river. Are you still carrying her?"

The Arab mystic, Abu Hassan Bushanja, says, "The act of sinning is much less harmful than the desire and thought of it. It is one thing for the body to indulge in a pleasurable act for a moment, and an entirely different thing for the mind and heart to chew on it endlessly." When religious people endlessly chew on sins that other people commit, one suspects that the chewing affords them more pleasure than the sinning affords the sinner.

QUEEN ELIZABETH

Pride and selfishness were characteristics of Queen Elizabeth, who ruled England for half a century, and she suffered much because of them. Her favorite courtier, the Earl of Essex, took part in a plot against his political enemies and was sentenced to die. The queen was eager to pardon him, but she said, "I would save him, but only if he humbles himself and asks me to." No message came, and Essex was put to death.

From that time on, Elizabeth's heartbreak affected her health, for she could not forget Essex. One day, as a lady-in-waiting to the queen lay dying, she sent for Queen Elizabeth and confessed that Essex had indeed entrusted her with a message pleading for his life and had given her his ring as proof, but that she had wanted Essex dead and had therefore never delivered the message. For Elizabeth, this knowledge was a wound from which she never recovered. She did little else for the rest of her days but mourn for Essex. Pride was her undoing.

TEARS OF REPENTANCE

There is a legend that says that once upon a time the Angel Gabriel called all the angels together. Each one was asked to visit earth and bring back to heaven the one gift that he thought would be most pleasing to God, the gift he thought would make God most happy. One angel saw a martyr dying for the faith -- he brought back a drop of his blood. Another brought back a small coin that an old destitute widow had given to the poor. Another returned with a Bible that had been used by an eminent preacher. Still another brought back dust from the shoes of a missionary laboring in a remote wasteland for many years. Others brought back similar things. One angel, however, saw a man sitting by a fountain in a town square. The man was looking at a child playing nearby. The man was a hardened sinner, but looking at the little child playing he remembered his own boyhood innocence. As he looked into the fountain he saw the reflection of his hardened face, he realized what he had done with his life, and now recalling his many sins he was sorry for them. Tears of repentance welled up in his eyes and began to trickle down his cheeks. At that point the angel took one of these tears and brought it back to heaven. And according to the legend, it was this gift that God chose before all the others as the one most dear to Him, the one that pleased Him the most, the one that made Him most happy.

'All Is Forgiven,'

*"Reconciliation
doesn't mean com-
promise. It means
that we share
common ground."*

THE PRODIGAL SON Here's one you can memorize and then recite at the Church Social. It is a lighter version of the familiar parable. I guess you could say it is in the 'Key of F.'

Feeling footloose and frisky, a featherbrained fellow forced his fond father to fork over the farthings and flew to foreign fields and frittered his fortune, feasting fabulously with faithless friends. Fleeced by his fellows in flooey, and facing famine, he found himself a feed-flinger in a filthy farmyard. Fairly famishing, he fain would have filled his frame with foraged food from fodder fragments.

"Fooley! My father's flunkies fare far finer," the frazzled fugitive forlornly fumbled, frankly facing facts. Frustrated by failure and filled with forboding, he fled forthwith to his family. Falling at his father's feet, he forlornly fumbled: "Father, I've flunked and fruitlessly forfeited family favor!!"

The farsighted father, forestalling further flinching, frantically flagged the flunkies to fetch a farling from the flock and fix a feast. The fugitive's fault-finding brother frowned on fickle forgiveness of former folderol. But the faithful father figured, "Filial fidelity is fine, but the fugitive is found! What forbids fervent festivity? Let flags be unfurled. Let fanfares flare." And the father's forgiveness formed the foundation for the former fugitives future fortitude.

LET GO

To let go does not mean to stop caring, it means I can't do it for someone else.
To let go is not to cut myself off, it's the realization I can't control another.
To let go is not to enable, but to allow learning from natural consequences.
To let go is to admit powerlessness, which mean the outcome is not in my hands.
To let go is not to try to change or blame another, it's to make the most of myself.
To let go is not to care for, but to care about.
To let go is not to fix, but to be supportive.
To let go is not to judge, but allow another to be a human being.
To let go is not to be in the middle arranging all the outcomes, but to allow others to affect their own destinies.
To let go is not to be protective, it's to permit another to face reality.
To let go is not to deny, but to accept.
To let go is not to nag, scold or argue, but instead to search out my own shortcomings and correct them.
To let go is not to adjust everything to my own desires, but to take each day as it comes and cherish myself in it.
To let go is not to regret the past, but to grow and life for the future.
To let go is to fear less and love more.

THE GREAT SIN Pride is one of the primary forms of wickedness. In his classic, Mere Christianity, C. S. Lewis refers to pride as The Great Sin:

"There is one vice of which no man in the world is free; which every one in the world loathes when he sees it in someone else; and of which hardly any people except Christians ever imagine that they are guilty themselves . . . There is no fault which makes a man more unpopular, and no fault which we are more unconscious of in ourselves. And the more we have it ourselves, the more we dislike it in others."

Lewis says it was "through Pride that the devil became the devil; Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind." And he acknowledges that that might sound exaggerated." (page 109)

"A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and, of course, as long as you're looking down, you can't see something that's above you." Thus, you cannot see God.
...

"If anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think tell him the first step. The first step is to realize that one is proud. And a biggish step, too. At least, nothing whatever can be done before it. If you think you are not conceited, it means you are very conceited indeed." [page 114]

It is necessary to repent for years in order to efface a fault in the eyes of men; a single tear suffices with God.

Francois Renée Chateaubriand

I think that if God forgives us we must forgive ourselves. Otherwise it is almost like setting up ourselves as a higher tribunal than him.

C.S. Lewis

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Colossians 3:13

All forgiveness, human and divine, is in the very nature of the case vicarious, substitutional. . . . No one ever really forgives another, except he bears the penalty of the other's sin against him.

James Buswell, Jr.

[On forgiveness in marriage] Forgiving will not immediately soothe your pain; instead, it introduces a different pain, a much more hopeful pain because it is redeeming. You do "deny yourself" and die a little in order to forgive. Pride dies. Fairness dies. Rights die, as do self-pity and the sweetness of a pout or the satisfaction of a little righteous wrath. You take leave of the center of the marriage and of your own existence. You die a little, that the marriage might rise alive.

Walter Wangerin, Jr.

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Matthew 6:14-15

God will not be ready to hear us, unless we also show ourselves ready to grant forgiveness to those who have offended us. . . . Those who refuse to forget the injuries which have been done to them, devote themselves willingly and deliberately to destruction, and knowingly prevent God from forgiving them.

John Calvin

Said General Oglethorpe to Wesley, "I never forgive."
"Then I hope, sir," said Wesley, "you never sin."

I EXPRESS THE PEACE, FREEDOM, AND
FORGIVENESS OF CHRIST.

Forgive

One of the basic and original tenets of Christianity is Jesus' admonition to: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." This divine idea springs into vital, living action when we remember that Christ indwells us and that we can express the peace, freedom, and forgiveness of Christ right where we are.

Jesus, the perfect expression of divine love, showed us the way of forgiveness, the way to live in harmony with any thought, action, or person. As we express the peace and freedom of Christ, it becomes easier for us to forgive any person, any real or imagined wrong.

In the face of criticism or slights, we are able to move surely forward in forgiveness. We are free to expect and to practice understanding, acceptance, and harmony in our relationships. Through Christ in us, we express love, peace, freedom, and forgiveness.

Be kind to one another . . . forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.—Eph. 4:32

What is the purpose of forgiveness? What happens when people aren't forgiven? What happens when they are forgiven? Read 2 Corinthians 2:5-8 to gain further insight into forgiveness.

List four situations when it's easy to forgive people.

List four situations when it's hard to forgive people.

After making those lists:

It's easy to forgive people when . . .

It's difficult to forgive people when . . .

The people who forgive me most often are . . .

I hold back forgiveness when . . .

One thing I could never forgive . . .

A brother who was insulted by another brother came to Abba Sisoes, and said to him: "I was hurt by my brother, and I want to avenge myself." The old man tried to console him and said: "Don't do that, my child. Rather leave vengeance to God." But he said: "I will not quit until I avenge myself." Then the old man said: "Let us pray, brother;" and standing up, he said: "O God, we no longer need you to take care of us since we now avenge ourselves." Hearing these words, the brother fell at the feet of the old man and said: "I am not going to fight with my brother any more. Forgive me, Abba."

**We all have a past.
We are all ex-
something. The beauty
of Christ's forgiveness
is that it reaches
into our past.**

FORGIVENESS Jesus expects us to love our enemies. And we say, "Dear God, how can we?" How can you love persons who are against you, who are determined to demean or destroy you? Are we expected to love those who torture us whether physically or mentally, or who vilify us? Is it humanly possible? It is humanly possible or Jesus would not have said it. And in our clearer moments we realize that such love and forgiveness are the only response that breaks the weary cycles of recrimination and escalating retaliation, that such forgiveness is the only creative offensive against hatred, violence and destruction.

Ernest Gordon tells how prisoners of war on the infamous Railway of Death in Burma (Bridge Over The River Kwai) during World War II reached that same point. They called on God to help them pray for those who had tortured and starved them into delirium, and the moment came when they could forgive and love their enemies. By loving instead of hating, they survived.

On February 9, 1960, Adolph Coors III was kidnapped and held for ransom. Seven months later his body was found on a remote hillside. He had been shot to death. Adolph Coors IV, then 15 years old, lost not only his father, but his best friend. For years young Coors hated Joseph Corbett, the man who was sentenced to life for the slaying.

Then, in 1975, Ad Coors became a Christian. And while he divested himself of his interest in the family brewery business, he could not divest himself of the hatred that consumed him. Resentment seethed within him and blighted his growth in faith. He prayed to God for help, because he realized how his hatred for Corbett was alienating him from God and other persons. The day came, however, when claiming the Spirit's presence, Ad Coors visited the maximum security unit of Colorado's Canon City penitentiary and tried to talk with Corbett, but Corbett refused to see him. So Coors left a Bible inscribed with this message: "I'm here to see you today and I'm sorry that we could not meet. As a Christian I am summoned by our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, to forgive you. I do forgive you . . . and I ask you to forgive me for the hatred I've held in my heart for you." Later Coors confessed, "I have a love for that man that only Jesus Christ could have put in my heart."

WORMS FOR FEATHERS Some of you may remember the fable of a skylark who came from a noble skylark family. He loved to fly high above the earth and sing beautiful melodies. One thing he did not like was the daily work of having to dig worms in order to receive nourishment and stay alive. You can imagine how excited he was when one day, soaring high above the earth, he saw a little man dressed in a scarlet coat walking down the road and hollering "Earth worms for sale. Earth worms traded for skylark feathers." The skylark zoomed down and said to the man, "What's the deal?"

"Two worms for one feather," the man answered. "Try it, you'll like it! It's a good deal!" So the skylark tried it and he liked it. He had so many feathers, after all. Who's going to miss one feather? He plucked a feather out, got his worms, and had a lot more time to just coast around that day. Day-after-day, the skylark plucked another feather and traded it for worms. Then the awful day came when he tried to fly but was barely able to get himself off the ground and came crashing down again. He realized what had happened. He was a bedraggled skylark, unable to fly. A contradiction in terms: a skylark that can't fly. And so he spent the whole day digging feverishly for worms. When evening came, the little man in the scarlet coat came by. The skylark said to him anxiously, "I've got to trade back." The little man just kept on walking, laughing as he went and shouting over his shoulder, "No deal, friend, Worms for feathers is my business, not feathers for worms."

JUST A SMALL ADDITION Elmer Kelen turned to leave the studio of a young Hungarian artist, Arpad Sebesy. He was angry and his parting words were, "That's a rotten portrait and I refuse to pay for it." The artist was crushed. He had wasted weeks on this painting and now the 500 pengos that he was going to lose on the deal flashed through his mind. Bitterly he recalled that the millionaire had only posed three times, so that the painting had to be done virtually from memory. Still, he didn't think it was a bad likeness."

Before the millionaire left his studio the artist called out, "One minute. Will you give me a letter saying you refused the portrait because it didn't resemble you?" Glad to get off the hook so easily, Kelen agreed and wrote the letter.

A few months later the Society of Hungarian Artists opened its exhibition at the Gallery of Fine Arts in Budapest. Soon afterwards Kelen's phone began to ring. Within a half an hour he appeared at the gallery and headed for the wing where a Sebesy painting was on display. It was the one he had rejected.

He glanced at the title and his face turned purple. Storming into the office of the gallery manager, he demanded that the portrait be removed at once. The manager explained quietly that all of the paintings were under contract to remain in the gallery the full six weeks of the exhibit.

But Kelen raged, "But it will make me the laughing stock of Budapest. It's libelous. I'll sue!"

The manager turned to his desk, drew out the letter Kelen had written at Sebesy's request and said coolly, "Just a moment. Since you yourself admit that the painting does not resemble you, you have no jurisdiction over its fate."

In desperation Kelen offered to buy the painting, only to find the price now ten times that of the original figure. With his reputation at stake, Kelen immediately wrote out a check for 5000 pengos.

Not only did the artist sell the rejected portrait to the man who had originally commissioned it, and get far more than the original price, but he achieved his revenge simply by exhibiting it with the title: "

FORGIVENESS This prayer was found in a church bombed in World War II. It would help if we could let it sink into our spirit:

The hatred which divides nation from nation, race from race, class from class, Father forgive.

The covetous desires of men and nations to possess what is not their own, Father forgive.

The greed which exploits the labors of men, and lays waste the earth, Father forgive.

Our envy of the welfare and happiness of others, Father forgive.

Our indifference to the plight of the homeless, Father forgive.

The lust which uses for ignoble ends the bodies of men and women, Father forgive.

The pride which leads us to trust in ourselves, and not in God, Father forgive.

The pride which leads us to trust in ourselves, and not in God, Father forgive.

Father forgive. All have sinned and come short of the Glory of God.

— The progress of our spiritual life is made up of successive discoveries in which we perceive that we have turned away from God instead of going toward him. That is what makes a great saint like St. Francis of Assisi declare himself chief among sinners.