

Did you know . . .

Learning to Forgive Through the Saints

To renounce vengeance and to leave our offender unpunished is very difficult, but what is expected of us. “Vengeance is mine; I will repay,” says the Lord.” (Rom. 12:19). This very difficult teaching was obeyed by the saints — although in some cases, not without a struggle — and we must also heed it. [Based on the article of the same name by Fr. Joseph M. Esper]

St. John Vianney noted, “The saints have no hatred, no bitterness; they forgive everything, and think they deserve much more for their offenses against God.”

The first Christian martyr, St. Stephen, shows us a great example of Christian forgiveness. As he was being stoned to death for his proclamation of the Gospel, his last words were “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.”(Acts 7:60)

The founder of the Society of Jesus, St. Ignatius of Loyola, once walked a hundred miles during the winter to nurse a man who had fallen ill — a man who, only a few weeks earlier, had stolen Ignatius’s meager savings.

St. Maria Goretti was murdered in 1902 when she was only twelve by a neighboring youth named Alessandro Serenelli; when she resisted his sexual advances. Before dying in a hospital the following day, Maria expressed her forgiveness of Alessandro. (It was eight years before he accepted it; Alessandro was unrepentant in prison, until he had a dream of Maria gathering flowers and presenting them to him.)

St. Augustine notes, “There are many kinds of alms, the giving of which helps us to obtain pardon for our sins; but none is greater than that by which we forgive from our heart a sin that someone has committed against us.” “If you are suffering from a bad man’s injustice, forgive him, lest there be two bad men.”

In his *Admonitions*, St. Francis of Assisi wrote, “Our Lord says in the Gospel, ‘Love your enemies.’ A man really loves his enemy when he is not offended by the injury done to him, but for love of God feels burning sorrow for the sin his enemy has brought on his own soul, and proves his love in a practical way.”

“Pardon one another so that later on you will not remember the injury. The recollection of an injury is itself wrong. It adds to our anger, nurtures our sin, and hates what is good. It is a rusty arrow and poison for the soul. It puts all virtue to flight.” — *St. Francis of Paola*

Even the saints were tempted by a desire for revenge, but through the help of God were able to overcome these feelings. We can, too.

[Next week: *Forgiving Oneself*]

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