

## Thoughts about Forgiveness

One of the most public examples of forgiveness in our time occurred in the aftermath of a false accusation of sexual abuse leveled by Steven Cook against Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago. After four months of worldwide, ugly publicity and a lawsuit, Cook withdrew the accusation. On the threshold of death from pancreatic cancer, Cardinal Bernardin gave an account of the meeting in which the two were reconciled. Cook had wanted the cardinal to tell the story for both of them.

“I felt deeply that this entire episode would not be complete until I followed my shepherd’s calling to seek him out. I only prayed that he would receive me. The experience of the false accusation would not be complete until I met and reconciled with Steven. Even though I had never heard from him, I sensed he also wanted to see me. . .

I explained to him that the only reason for requesting the meeting was to bring closure to the traumatic events of last winter by personally letting him know that I harbored no ill feelings toward him . . . The words I am using to tell you this story cannot begin to describe the power of God’s grace at work that afternoon. It was a manifestation of God’s love, forgiveness, and healing that I will never forget.”

Joseph Cardinal Bernardin

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“There are some things for which you should NOT forgive yourself - simply because they do not require forgiveness. You may be carrying a feeling of guilt for things for which you bear no responsibility. If you have been carrying false guilt, talk to someone, and above all, talk to God about it.

Help me, God, to know what is my fault and ask forgiveness; to know what is not mine and let it go.”

From: Jubilee Journal: A Workbook of Forgiving for the Millennium by Mary Cabrini Durkin, OSU and Sheila Durkin Dierks

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“It feels impossible, O God totally beyond my reach,  
to forgive what has been done to me.

You know my pain,  
You know the hurt I hold.”

Edward Hays

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“Father, forgive them, for  
they know not what they do.”

“These are words of Jesus in his last hour. This time they apply to me. If I knew that my last hour were upon me, what baggage would I like to set down? What heaviness of heart would I wish to let go of, so that my spirit might rise? Might I be relieved to put down that heavy weight now, if only I knew how to pry loose my fingers? Jesus let go of the need to blame, to have pain befall those who had hurt him. Finally, he could say,

Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit.”

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“The flight to God’s word of forgiveness, which is most distinctly spoken through the word of Jesus in the Church, is not a matter of panic or of coming apart at the seams or of being insecure about life, but rather of a liberating experience achieved through God . . . Christianity is this message: we should allow ourselves to be forgiven. And the Church offers us the means: the sacrament of penance.”

Karl Rahner