

Father John Catoir

# Forgiveness

A friend of mine suffered a serious emotional blow when she discovered her husband's darkest secret. I cannot mention the problem, but she was devastated.

When she approached me for help, I listened with respect for a long time before I said a word. Here is a summary of what I eventually told her.



"My heart goes out to you. Your anger is absolutely legitimate. This pain is part of a process you must pass through and endure as best you can. It will subside in time, but you'll have to deal forth-rightly with all the issues.

"One of the main issues is forgiveness. Will you, can you forgive him? Without forgiveness the wound in your soul will fester. I would advise you to try. When you forgive, it doesn't necessarily mean that he deserves it. You forgive because Our Lord asks it of you.

"I know at times you feel a murderous rage toward him. You don't feel like forgiving, but you know the Lord wants it precisely because He wants you to be at peace. Consequently think about forgiving him, even before you feel like. In other words you forgive. I assure you, the simple desire to forgive will be the first step in your healing process.

"Forgiveness is in the will and the will says yes or no. Even if your feelings have

not caught up, forgiveness begins when you will it. It may be of some help to know that forgiveness is not the same as absolution. Only God can absolve, and He does so only when a sinner repents and seeks absolution. God is always ready to forgive, but that isn't the same as absolution. The Prodigal Son had to return and ask for reconciliation. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is a model for the healing which can only begin when the sinner seeks absolution.

"In the meantime, don't let the past drag you down. Be patient with yourself. Don't blame yourself for what has happened. Your husband is responsible for this mess he created, not you. Remember too, that Christian joy is not the absence of pain. Joy comes from the knowledge of God's love. Even in the midst of pain, there can be a sweet joy in the knowledge of God's presence and love.

"Get out in the sun and enjoy the life God has given you. Talk to a trusted friend. Travel. Relish the moment. Listen to the sound of the birds singing, smell the flowers, enjoy a good meal, buy a hat, bake a cake. Believe that you will rise from the ashes like the Phoenix and with God's help you will find happiness once again.

"I will keep you in Mass and prayer (as I do all my readers). God bless you."

*[For a free copy of the Christopher News Note, The Power of Forgiveness, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to The Christophers, 12 E. 48th St., New York, N.Y. 10017.]*