



Drawing by Robert Rivera

Forgive one another

WISDOM FROM THE CELLS

Ever since I got convicted of my crime and got sentenced to fifty years to life, I hated my co-defendant. He decided to testify against me in exchange for a lighter sentence. He was my best friend in the streets. I would have taken a bullet for him.

I hated him all these years and wanted a chance to get out so that I could get revenge at him for betraying me. I hated him for robbing me of the chance to be out there for my daughter. I hated him for years, and that heavy load of hate was taking its toll on me. One day during a retreat, we were asked to write about someone we hated and the reasons why we hated that person. That day, I wrote about Jose.

After reading to the group what I had written, Father Manny pulled me to the side and told me, "Let go of that hate. He's not worth it." Later on, I went back to my cell, thinking of what Father Manny had told me, and the longer I thought about it, the more sense it made. But still I couldn't forgive him.

The next day I woke up and turned the radio on. I was expecting to hear some music, but instead I heard a voice on the radio saying, "He who can't forgive destroys the bridge he has to use to cross." It had to be Jesus using this man on the radio to send me a clear message. In order for me to be forgiven, I needed to learn to forgive as well. That day, I decided to forgive Jose.

Even though my pride wouldn't have allowed me to testify against him, I now know that he made the best decision for himself. He didn't allow his pride to get in the way and instead chose his family before his homies. He chose to tell the truth. How could I hate him for choosing to be with his daughter? The things that I hated him for were because of my choices, my decisions. I chose to gang bang. I chose to pick up the gun. It was my action that landed me in prison with a life sentence. I needed to take responsibility for my actions and stop blaming others.

I realized that I could no longer spend my time hating Jose. After I sincerely forgave him, a huge weight was lifted off my heart. I didn't realize how much of a toll it was taking on me until I decided to let go of that hate.

- Erik, who is in a California state prison.

PENITENTIAL RITE

**Lord, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.**
May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins and bring us to everlasting life.
R. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Let us pray:
Forgiving Father,
you are good and patient,
compassionate, loving and
merciful with us. You
forgive all our debt of sin.
Help us to forgive one
another, as you do all the
time for us.

We ask this through Christ
our Lord. **R. Amen.**

REFLECTION: I remember a time when I found it difficult to forgive someone... I remember how difficult this was... I remember.... I remember....

OUR FATHER

At the Savior's command and formed by divine teaching, we dare to say:

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy Kingdom come,
thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against
us, and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.**

**R. For the kingdom, the power and the
glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.**

LAMB OF GOD

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world:

R. have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world:

R. have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world:

R. grant us peace.

Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.

**R. Lord, I am not worthy that you should
enter under my roof, but only say the word
and my soul shall be healed.**

COMMUNION

CLOSING PRAYER

Let us pray:

Merciful Lord,
Often times it is difficult to forget and forgive others, yet Jesus did not condemn but gave new chances. Let your pardon bring us much healing and hope so that we, too, can learn to forgive from the heart.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

R. Amen.



LITURGY OF THE WORD

First Reading: Sirach 27:30–28:7

Wrath and anger are hateful things, yet the sinner hugs them tight. The vengeful will suffer the LORD's vengeance, for he remembers their sins in detail. Forgive your neighbor's injustice; then when you pray, your own sins will be forgiven. Could anyone nourish anger against another and expect healing from the LORD? Could anyone refuse mercy to another like himself, can he seek pardon for his own sins? If one who is but flesh cherishes wrath, who will forgive his sins? Remember your last days, set enmity aside; remember death and decay, and cease from sin! Think of the commandments, hate not your neighbor; remember the Most High's covenant, and overlook faults.

The Word of the Lord.
R. Thanks be to God.

Second Reading: Romans 14:7-9

Brothers and sisters: None of us lives for oneself, and no one dies for oneself. For if we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord; so then, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For this is why Christ died and came to life, that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

The Word of the Lord.
R. Thanks be to God.

Gospel: Matthew 18:21-35

Peter approached Jesus and asked him, "Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus answered, "I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times. That is why the kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king who decided to settle accounts with his servants. When he began the accounting, a debtor was brought before him who owed him a huge amount. Since he had no way of paying it back, his master ordered him to be sold, along with his wife, his children, and all his property, in payment of the debt. At that, the servant fell down, did him homage, and said, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back in full.' Moved with compassion the master of that servant let him go and forgave him the loan. When that servant had left, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a much smaller amount. He seized him and started to choke him, demanding, 'Pay back what you owe.' Falling to his knees, his fellow servant begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' But he refused. Instead, he had the fellow servant put in prison until he paid back the debt. Now when his fellow servants saw what had happened, they were deeply disturbed, and went to their master and reported the whole affair. His master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you your entire debt because you begged me to. Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant, as I had pity on you?' Then in anger his master handed him over to the torturers until he should pay back the whole debt. So will my heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives your brother from your heart."

The Gospel of the Lord.
R. Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 103:1-2, 3-4, 9-10, 11-12

R. The Lord is kind and merciful, slow to anger, and rich in compassion.

Bless the LORD, O my soul;
and all my being, bless his holy name.
Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits.

R. The Lord is kind and merciful, slow to anger, and rich in compassion.

He pardons all your iniquities,
heals all your ills.
He redeems your life from destruction,
crowns you with kindness and compassion.

R. The Lord is kind and merciful, slow to anger, and rich in compassion.

He will not always chide,
nor does he keep his wrath forever.
Not according to our sins does he deal with us,
nor does he requite us according to our crimes.

R. The Lord is kind and merciful, slow to anger, and rich in compassion.

(from the eyes of dismas)

this torture had been
going on for so long

i did not know
how long i would be able
to endure this torture

i looked out in front of me
saw my two older brothers
my little sisters were
holding my mother's hands

deep sorrow
shot through me
how is it possible that
i could cause my family
so much suffering?
how is this possible?

my blood was dripping
from the holes in my hands
there was blood all over
my tortured body
it seemed as if i could not
stand this suffering
one more moment

i looked over at jesus
and as i tried to focus
in on his face
trying to see through
all my dried blood

as i looked at jesus
something changed
within me
i had heard so many things
about this healer
and here i was
dying alongside of him
what had he ever done
to deserve this torture?

as i gazed into his face
into the depths of the pain
in this place
i heard his words clearly

abba
abba father
forgive them
they do not know
what they are doing

all i had within me was hate
forgive them?
how could i ever do this?

again
i heard jesus say

MEDITATION: FORGIVENESS

abba forgive them
they do now know
what they are doing

this pushed me
into a dark place
forgiveness?

this took me back
to the time i was
in my house years ago
i was back in that corner
where my dad
would beat me
when he was drunk
i remember the hate
i felt in my heart
it is the same kind of hate
i am feeling now
against these soldiers

everyone in my family
was in front of me
except my father

he had begun to drink
even more
got deeper and deeper
into debt
and was more violent
at home
when they found
his dead body
i shed no tears
i only felt hate for him
he was an animal
there was no love
in his heart

so listening
to these words of jesus
i ask myself
have i ever forgiven
my father?
have i lived with such strong
hate all these years?
i used to go to the streets
willing to fight anyone
was this due to the
poisonous wound
my father left me within?
forgive my father?
could i actually do this?
forgive him after how
he mistreated his children?
forgive him after how
he beat my mother
when i was too young
to protect her?

it was as if jesus
could read my thoughts

then jesus said to me
dismas
what was the name
of your father?
when he said this
my mother and siblings
moved beneath the cross
i said his name was seth

at that moment
my mother began to cry
she stood beneath jesus'
cross and put her hands
against the nails in his feet
when she removed
her hands
blood covered her hands

deep mystery
was taking place
in this sacred circle
so deep that i was lost

she then came
beneath my cross
and put her hands
covered with jesus' blood
against my feet

son
she said
i know you can't forgive
on your own
but let this one's blood
give you the strength
to forgive

then it happened
i could feel a love so great
from the blood of jesus
that i could feel
he was forgiving me
for all the darkness
i had caused in my life
it was as if my whole being
was being filled with god
and then i said
out loud

father
i will soon die
i do not understand
why you did
what you did to us
i will never understand
but before i die

i want to tell you
something
i have learned from
this teacher jesus who is
also dying next to me
when i heard him say
that he forgave those
who tortured him
and when my mother
put her hands on his feet
with the blood
flowing from jesus
i knew i too
could do the impossible

so there in that moment
with only jesus
my family
and my mother
i said out loud
father
i forgive you

in that moment
everything was still
no sound
forgiveness was being felt
with the words

father
after everything
i really do forgive you

i looked down
at my mother
and she looked up at me
saying
dismas
i love you more than
you can imagine

even in all this agony
there was a joy
in my heart
when i heard my mother
tell me how much
she loves me
i looked over at jesus
and then i really was lost
in mystery

jesus saying
dismas
today you will be with me
in paradise
you will be reunited
with your father

you may go gently now
your soul finally
has peace...

