

## Forgive Us as We Forgive

Notice, sisters, that He does not say: “as we shall forgive.” We are to understand that anyone who asks for so great a gift as that just mentioned, and has already yielded his own will to the will of God, must have done this already. And so He says: “as we forgive our debtors.” Anyone, then, who sincerely repeats this petition, “*Fiat voluntas tua*”, must, at least in intention, have done this already. You see now why the saints rejoiced in insults and persecutions: it was because these gave them something to present to the Lord when they prayed to Him. What can a poor creature like myself do, who has had so little to forgive others and has so much to be forgiven herself? This, sisters, is something which we should consider carefully; it is such a serious and important matter that God should pardon us our sins, which have merited eternal fire, that we must pardon all trifling things which have been done to us *and which are not wrongs at all, or anything else. For how is it possible, either in word or in deed, to wrong one who, like myself, has deserved to be plagued by devils forever? Is it not only right that I should be plagued in this world too?* As I have so few, Lord, even of these trifling things, to offer Thee, Thy pardoning of me must be a free gift: there is abundant scope here for Thy mercy. *Thy Son must pardon me, for no one has done me any injustice, and so there has been nothing that I can pardon for Thy sake. But take my desire to do so, Lord, for I believe I would forgive any wrong if Thou wouldst forgive me and I might unconditionally do Thy will. True, if the occasion were to arise, and I were condemned without cause, I do not know what I should do. But at this moment I see that I am so guilty in Thy sight that everything I might have to suffer would fall short of my deserts, though anyone not knowing, as Thou knows, what I am, would think I was being wronged.* Blessed be Thou, Who endures one that is so poor: when Thy *most holy* Son makes this petition in the name of all mankind, I cannot be included, being such as I am and having nothing to give. (W 36,2)

How greatly the Lord must esteem this mutual love of ours one for another! ... The good Jesus might have put everything else before our love for one another, and said: “Forgive us, Lord, because we are doing a great deal of penance, or because we are praying often, and fasting, and because we have left all for Thy sake and love Thee greatly.” But He has never said: because we would lose our lives for Thy sake”; or any of these [numerous] other things which He might have said. He simply says: “**Because we forgive.**” Perhaps *the reason He said this rather than anything else* was because He knew that our fondness for this dreadful **honor** made mutual love the hardest virtue for us to attain, though it is the virtue dearest to His Father. *Because of its very difficulty* He put it where He did, and *after having asked for so many great gifts for us,* He offers it on our behalf to God. (W 36,7)

... I know many persons to whom Our Lord has granted the grace of raising them to supernatural experiences and of giving them this prayer, or contemplation, which has been described; and although I may notice other faults and imperfections in them, I have never seen such a person who had this particular fault, nor do I believe such a person exists, if the favors he has received are of God. If any one of you receives high favors, let her look within herself and see if they are producing these effects, and, if they are not, let her be very fearful, and believe that these consolations are not of God, Who, as I have said, when He visits the soul, always enriches it. That is certain; for, although the grace and the consolations may pass quickly, it can be recognized in due course through the benefits which it bestows on the soul. And, as the good Jesus knows this well, He gives a definite assurance to His Holy Father that we are forgiving our debtors. (W36 13)

### The Our Father is a Summary of all of Perfection

The sublimity of the perfection of this evangelical prayer is something for which we should give great praise to the Lord. So well composed by the good Master was it, daughters, that each of us may use it in her own way. I am astounded when I consider that in its few words are enshrined all contemplation and perfection, so that if we study it no other book seems necessary. For thus far in the Paternoster the Lord has taught us the whole method of prayer and of high contemplation, from the very beginnings of mental prayer, to Quiet and Union. With so true a foundation to build upon, I could write a great book on prayer if only I knew how to express myself. As you have seen, Our Lord is beginning here to explain to us the effects which it produces, when the favors come from Him. (W37,1)

## **Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from Evil**

### **The Tempter**

Believe me, sisters, the soldiers of Christ — namely, those who experience contemplation and practice prayer— are always ready for the hour of conflict. They are never very much afraid of their open enemies, for they know who they are and are sure that their strength can never prevail against the strength which they themselves have been given by the Lord: they will always be victorious and gain great riches, so they will never turn their backs on the battle. Those whom they fear, and fear rightly, and from whom they always beg the Lord to deliver them, are enemies who are treacherous, devils who transform themselves and come and visit them in the disguise of angels of light. The soul fails to recognize them until they have done it a great deal of harm; they suck our life-blood and put an end to our virtues and we go on yielding to temptation without knowing it. From these enemies let us pray the Lord often, in the Our Father, to deliver us: may He not allow us to run into temptations which deceive us; may their poison be detected; and may light and truth not be hidden from us... (W38,2)

Where the devil can do great harm without our realizing it is in making us believe that we possess virtues which we do not: that is pestilential. (38, 5)

If we think the Lord has given us a certain virtue, we must understand that it is a blessing which we have received but which He may take away from us again, as indeed, in the great providence of God, often happens. Have you never observed this yourselves, sisters? I certainly have: sometimes I think I am extremely detached, and, in fact, when it comes to the test, I am; yet at other times I find I have such attachment to things which the day before I should perhaps have scoffed at that I hardly know myself. (W 38,6)

### **False and Real Humility**

Beware also, daughters, of certain kinds of humility which the devil inculcates in us and which make us very uneasy about the gravity of our *past* sins. There are many ways in which he is accustomed to depress us so that in time we withdraw from Communion and give up our private prayer, because the devil suggests to us that we are not worthy to engage in it. When we come to the Most Holy Sacrament, we spend the time during which we ought to be receiving grace in wondering whether we are properly prepared or no. The thing gets to such a pass that a soul can be made to believe that, through being what it is, it has been forsaken by God, and thus it almost doubts His mercy. Everything such a person does appears to her to be dangerous, and all the service she renders, however good it may be, seems to her fruitless. She loses confidence and sits with her hands in her lap because she thinks she can do nothing well and that what is good in others is wrong in herself. (W 39,1)

Pay great attention, daughters, to this point which I shall now make, because sometimes thinking yourselves so wicked may be humility and virtue and at other times a very great temptation. I have had experience of this, so I know it is true. Humility, however deep it be, neither disquiets nor troubles nor disturbs the soul; it is accompanied by peace, joy and tranquility. Although, on realizing how wicked we are, we can see clearly that we deserve to be in hell, and are distressed by our sinfulness, and rightly think that everyone should hate us, yet, if our humility is true, this distress is accompanied by an interior peace and joy of which we should not like to be deprived. Far from disturbing or depressing the soul, it enlarges it and makes it fit to serve God better. The other kind of distress only disturbs and upsets the mind and troubles the soul, so grievous is it. I think the devil is anxious for us to believe that we are humble, and, if he can, to lead us to distrust God. (W 39,2)

### **Love and Fear of GOD**

Show us, then, O our good Master, some way in which we may live through this most dangerous warfare without frequent surprise. The best way that we can do this, daughters, is to use the love and fear given us by His Majesty. For love will make us quicken our steps, while fear will make us look where we are setting our feet so that we shall not fall on a road where there are so many obstacles. Along that road all living creatures must pass, and if we have these two things we shall certainly not be deceived. (W 40,1)

Those who really love God love all good, seek all good, help forward all good, praise all good, and invariably join forces with good men and help and defend them. They love only truth and things worthy

of love. Do you think it possible that anyone who really and truly loves God can love vanities, riches, worldly pleasures or honours? Can he engage in strife or feel envy? No; for his only desire is to please the Beloved. Such persons die with longing for Him to love them and so they will give their lives to learn how they may please Him better. Will they hide their love? No: if their love for God is genuine love they cannot. Why, think of Saint Paul or the Magdalene. One of these—Saint Paul—found in three days that he was sick with love. The Magdalene discovered this on the very first day. And how certain of it they were! For there are degrees of love for God, which shows itself in proportion to its strength. If there is little of it, it shows itself but little; if there is much, it shows itself a great deal. But it always shows itself, whether little or much, provided it is real love for God. (W 40,3)

Let us now come to the fear of God...this fear of God is another thing with which those who possess it and those who have to do with them are very familiar. But I should like you to realize that at first it is not very deep, save in a few people, to whom, as I have said, the Lord grants such great favors as to make them rich in virtues *and to raise them, in a very short time, to great heights of prayer*. It is not recognizable, therefore, at first, in everyone. As it increases, it grows stronger each day, and then, of course, it can be recognized, for those who possess it forsake sin, and occasions of sin, and bad company, and other signs of it are visible in them. When at last the soul attains to contemplation, of which we are chiefly treating at the moment, its fear of God is plainly revealed, and its love is not dissembled even outwardly. However narrowly we watch such persons, we shall not find them growing careless; for, close as our watch on them may be, the Lord so preserves them that they would not knowingly commit one venial sin even to further their own interests, and, as for mortal sin, they fear it like fire. These are the illusions, sisters, which I should like you always to fear; let us always beseech God that temptation may not be strong enough for us to offend Him but that He may send it to us in proportion to the strength which He gives us to conquer it. *If we keep a pure conscience, we can suffer little or no harm*. That is the important point; and that is the fear which I hope will never be taken from us, for it is that fear which will stand us in good stead. (W 41,1)

Keep this in mind, for it is very important advice, so do not neglect it until you find you have such a fixed determination not to offend the Lord that you would rather lose a thousand lives *and be persecuted by the whole world*, than commit one mortal sin, and until you are most careful not to commit venial sins. I am referring now to sins committed knowingly: as far as those of the other kind are concerned, who can fail to commit them frequently... may God deliver us, especially since we are sinning against so great a Sovereign and realizing that He is watching us! That seems to me to be a sin committed of malice aforethought; it is as though one were to say: "Lord, although this displeases Thee, I shall do it. I know that Thou see it and I know that Thou wouldst not have me do it; but, though I understand this, I would rather follow my own whim and desire than Thy will." If we commit a sin in this way, however slight, it seems to me that our offence is not small but very, very great. (W41, 3)

### **Don't Be Too Strict**

Do not be too strict with yourselves, then, for, if your soul gets discouraged, it will do great harm to what is good in you and may sometimes lead to scrupulosity, which is a hindrance to progress both in yourselves and in others. Even if things are not as bad as this, a person, however good in herself, will not lead many souls to God if they see that she is so strict and timid. Human nature is such that these characteristics will frighten and oppress it and lead people to avoid the road you are taking, even if they are quite clear it is the most virtuous one. (W41,5)

### **Amen!**

By the word "Amen," as it comes at the end of the *Our Father*, I understand that the Lord is begging that we may be delivered from all evil forever...I beseech the Lord, then, to deliver me from all evil forever, since I cannot pay what I owe, and may perhaps run farther into debt each day. And the hardest thing to bear, Lord, is that I cannot know with any certainty if I love Thee and if my desires are acceptable in Thy sight. O my God and Lord, deliver me from all evil and be pleased to lead me to that place where all good things are to be found. What can be looked for on earth by those to whom Thou hast given some knowledge of what the world is and those who have a living faith in what the Eternal Father has laid up for them...? (W 42,2)