

The Way of Perfection

Part 5: Our Father: Forgive Us Our Trespasses

Chapter 36 (summary)
Saint Teresa of Avila

Chapter 36 Discusses these words of the our Father; forgive us our trespasses.

Our Good Master saw that with this **heavenly bread** all is **easy** for us save through our own fault, and that we are able to allow the **Father's will** to be done in us.

Now He tells the Father to **forgive us our debts** since we forgive. So going on with the prayer He teaches us, "**And forgive us, Lord, our debts as we forgive our debtors.**"

2. Note, Sisters, that He doesn't say "**as we will forgive.**" Whoever ... has already surrendered his will to God's should have already forgiven. So, He says, "**as we forgive.**" Anyone who has sincerely said **Thy will be done**, to the Lord, should have already done that **will** entirely; at least has had the **resolve** to.

This explains why the saints were pleased with the **wrongs** and **persecution** they suffered; they then had something to **offer** the Lord when they prayed to Him...

We need to reflect on this much, Sisters ... that our Lord forgives our faults, deserving of **eternal fire**, based on us lowly creatures forgiving others ...

In sum, my Lord, I have nothing to give You to allow me to ask You to forgive my debts. May Your Son pardon me; no one has done me an **injustice**, and so I have nothing to pardon for Your sake, unless, Lord, You accept my desire...

3. If there are persons in my company who have not understood this ... I beg them ...to pay no attention to the little things they call wrongs. We are like children making houses out of straw with our rules of etiquette ... There was a time when I prized honor without understanding what it was. I was just following the crowd. So many things offended me! I am ashamed now! ...

At the time, I was not careful about either the **little rules** of etiquette or the **main rule**

because I did not consider the **beneficial honor**, the honor that **benefits the soul**.

Honor and **profit** do not go well together. The soul's profit, and what the world calls honor, can never go together. The world moves in the opposite direction. Blessed be the Lord who drew us out of it.

May it please His Majesty that such a concept of honor always remain far from this house.

There are monasteries where they pay attention to these little rules. What great foolishness! ... I want to tell you about it, Sisters so that you will guard against it.

4. The **devil** has not forgotten us, Sisters. He invents his own honors in **monasteries** and established his **own laws**. There, people ascend and descend in rank as in the world. Those with degrees must follow in order... Amongst ourselves, the one who has been prioress must remain ineligible for any lower office; a preoccupation about who the senior is ... and we even think we gain merit by such concerns ...

5. One doesn't know whether to laugh or cry ... All our **perfection** doesn't consist in the observance of what has to do with our **honor** ... O Lord, Are You our **Model** and **Master**? Yes, indeed! Well then, what did **Your honor** consist of, You who honored us? Didn't You indeed lose it in being **humiliated unto death**? No, Lord, You **won it** for all.

6. Oh, for the love of God, Sisters, how we get lost on the road because we start out wrong from the beginning.

Please God that no soul will be lost by keeping these miserable rules of etiquette without truly understanding what honor consists of.

We shall end up thinking we have done a great deal in pardoning a little thing that was neither an offense nor anything...

Help us understand that we do not know ourselves and come to You with **empty hands**; and **pardon us** through Your **mercy**. Indeed, **You** are always the **wronged** and **offended one**. Lord, since **all** but punishment comes to an end, I only see you granting us so great a favor because Your Son asks it of You.

7. The Lord must esteem the love we have for one another! Indeed, Jesus could have put **other virtues** first such as a great deal of penance or prayer or fasting ...But He said

only, “**forgive us because we forgive.**” Perhaps He said the prayer and offered it on our behalf because He knows we are so fond of this **miserable honor** and to be **forgiving** is a virtue **difficult** for us to attain by ourselves but most **pleasing** to His Father.

8. Consider, Sisters, that He says, “**as we forgive,**” as though it was **already done** ... Pay close attention, for when among the favors God grants in the **prayer of perfect contemplation** ... there doesn't arise in the soul a desire to pardon any injury don't trust much in that soul's prayer ...

The soul God brings to Himself in so sublime a **contemplation** is not touched by these wrongs nor does it care at all whether it is esteemed or not ... For when truly the Lord has given His **kingdom** here below, the soul no longer desires **honor** in this world ...

The soul has already seen, through experience, that the great **gain** and **progress** come to it by **suffering for God**. Seldom does God give great **gifts**, save to persons who have willingly undergone many **trials** for Him ... The trials of contemplatives are great, and so the Lord looks for contemplatives among people who have been **tested**.

9. Sisters, contemplatives already know what everything is worth. They are not long delayed by a passing thing. If a **great trial** causes **pain**, their **reason** comes to their rescue before the pain is fully felt ... The pain is almost completely annihilated by **joy**.

Joy comes from the **trial** the Lord has entrusted to them by which they will gain more grace and perpetual favors from His Majesty than in ten years of trials undertaken on their own.

Just as others prize **gold** and **jewels**, they prize trials and desire them. They know trials will make them **rich**.

10. **Self-esteem** is far removed from these persons. They like others to know of their **sins** and to tell about them when others **esteem** them. The same is true about **lineage** ...

It is to these souls that God grants the grace of **humility** and great **love** for Himself. They are so **forgetful of self** that they cannot believe others feel things and consider them an **affront**.

11. These latter effects are found in persons closer to **perfection**. The Lord habitually

favors them by bringing them close to Him in **perfect contemplation**.

The **first effect** though, is the resolve to **suffer wrongs** even though painful. Those who have experienced the **prayer of union** are granted this favor.

If one does **not experience** these effects and come away from prayer **fortified** in them, believe the favor was not from God...

12. The soul may not be immediately **fortified** but if the Lord continues to grant the favor, the soul will be fortified in the **virtue of forgiving**, though not in other virtues.

I cannot believe that a person who comes so close Mercy itself, **where he realized what he is and the great deal God has pardoned him of**, would **fail to pardon his offender** immediately, in complete ease, and with a readiness to remain on very good terms with him. Such a person is mindful of the gift granted by God by which he saw signs of **great love**; and he rejoices that an opportunity is offered to show the Lord some love.

13. I know many who have been raised to the **prayer of contemplation**. They still have **faults** but I have never seen anyone who lacked the **virtue of forgiveness**.

The soul who receives increasing favors from God should note if these **effects** are increasing. If not, refuse to believe the gifts are from God. For **God's favors** always **enrich** the soul it reaches. This is certain. The favor and gift pass quickly, but it is gradually recognized through the benefits the soul receives. Since Jesus knows this well, He says resolutely to His holy Father that “**we pardon our debtors.**” AMEN