

**Encouraging Word**  
**De Baca County News**  
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*“Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Mt. 18:21*

As mortar shells, rockets, and threats fly across Ukraine, Americans and people the world over are influenced by newscasters, politicians, and corporations to take sides and vilify each other. And over what? Over tensions in a conflicted region of the world few would have been able to accurately identify on a map a month ago.

Even the Vatican – often neutral – weighs into the fray. The Pope, consecrating Russia to Mary’s Immaculate Heart at 10am on March 25<sup>th</sup> in fulfillment of the 1917 Fatima message, at least offers the hope of heaven’s miraculous peace.

Given the fog of war, put all the disinformation, deep fakes, and shilling aside. Be assured there are no “good guys” in this historically complicated and convoluted flare up. How has all this March madness brought us to the brink of WWII?

Human nature hasn’t changed a smidgen since time began. The heart of all human conflict is fear and anger, entitlement and power struggle, envy and jealousy, and above all resentment and unforgiveness. Every war, whether geopolitical or personal, results from a snowballing of sins.

God gives us His example for dodging this cascade of evils on nearly every page of sacred scripture, e.g. Lk 23:34. St. John Chrysostom reminds, “Nothing makes us so God-like as our willingness to forgive.”

After an embarrassment, an injustice, an insult, resentment and ill-will are overwhelming. Our insides boil. A tempest rages in our hearts. How do we find peace? We must totally forswear these sentiments. Give no quarter to this ill-will. With the force of our whole being, we have to shout – sometimes aloud – “I reject it! I renounce these passions of revenge within me. I disavow them in the holy name of Jesus!”

Just because we feel these sentiments, it does not mean that we have fallen from grace. Emotions are never sins as they do not come from our consent; they arise before our will is engaged.

Fr. Jean du Cœur de Jésus d’Elbée reminds, “Even if the resentment is very strong, so strong that we do not succeed in dominating it, it is possible not to consent to it. . . . But what counts is this “no,” for it depends on our will whether we say sincerely “yes” or “no”; it does not depend on our will—at least directly—whether we feel or do not feel anger. If you have not consented, you have not been lacking in charity.”

How can we be sure to avoid sin amidst strong temptation? Mentally talk it through. If you were to meet the object of your ire, ask, “Would I be kind to him today? Would I greet her with a smile? Would I be willing to help him in a necessity?” Or more difficult still, “Would I ask her to help me so that I would owe her thanks?” Force yourself to say “YES” with all your strength!

Another method for overcoming these strong impulses to resentment and grudges is to force ourselves to see the good in others and make excuses for their bad behavior. I remember my late mother always made me say three nice things about someone – embarrassingly, often my lovely sister – after I had spoken badly about her.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux advises, “Excuse your neighbor interiorly. Excuse intention if you are unable to excuse action. Consider it as done in ignorance, or unawares, or through weakness. If the matter is so weighty that you cannot possibly overlook it, then try to believe the following and say to yourself: the temptation must have been very strong!” How much better would we feel if others gave us this consideration during our great blunders.

Maybe this advice today seems impossible, a chimerical fantasy. Perhaps you won’t have the gumption when the moment strikes. Fine, but remind yourself of these ideals and wish you had the courage to do it. It takes no special valor for the Christian to pray for the person. We are commanded to pray for those who curse and spitefully use us, cf. Lk 6:28 – which should always be our immediate, heartfelt reaction to evil.

Pray for what? Pray for his conversion, yes. Heaven is the bare minimum we must wish all people, but such smacks of self-righteousness. Pray, rather, that he receives as much good as you wanted him evil; that will spite your resentful pride.

On the cusp of WWII, can we expect that proud nations relinquish disputes and resolve centuries of ill-will and abuse overnight? It probably has the same odds as pompous cats and dogs doing the same – or hidebound donkeys and elephants if you’d rather. But for individuals – and Christians no less – letting go of grudges and soothing bitternesses promises much more hope. Jesus Christ never came to save or transform governments or political factions but sinners. The true disciple adds, *“Among whom I am the foremost”* (1Tim 1:15). God love you friends+