

**Encouraging Word**  
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*“Be merciful... Stop judging... Stop condemning... Forgive.” Lk 6:36-37*

The gospel exhorts us to see things through the eyes of Jesus. His eyes are eyes full of mercy for the sinner, begging for a merciful vision towards all. The rub is that it means not only granting the benefit of the doubt to the people we like, but especially toward those we find difficult, our enemies – even when they do not repent or attempt to relent.

We know that the whole of Scripture reminds us that we must be a people always ready to forgive. God has given us *“ministry of reconciliation”* (2Cor 5:18). Jesus commands that we forgive our brother who offends us not merely seven times but the symbolically infinite *“seventy times seven”* (Mt. 18:21ff.) St. John Chrysostom teaches, *“Nothing makes us so God-like as our willingness to forgive.”*

Yet, when someone continually taxes my patience; when they beg and never repay; when they constantly run me down and disappoint; when they harm me so badly with malice and do the unthinkable – even as family — I can’t let that go. I won’t! Jesus may have been able to say from the Cross, *“Father, forgive them for they know not what they do,”* but He is God; I’m not. Human beings can’t do that.

Have you heard about Immaculée Ilibagiza? Her heart wrenching story of surviving genocide – recounted in her best-selling lifestory [Left to Tell: Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Holocaust](#) – dramatically depicts her struggle to forgive her family’s brutal murderers. After order was restored, she relates, *“God was telling me, ‘Choose Love!’ I was a prisoner of anger; I felt pain from it.”* Despite being free from her persecutors and able to begin life again, Immaculée was held bound and continuously tortured by the anger she retained. She could exclaim with the lead singer of Creed – Mark Tremonti – *“I’ve created my own prison.”*

How do we break out of this hidden penitentiary of anger? Continually plagued by the hatred to which she clung, Immaculée finally reflected, *“I knew that my heart and mind would always be tempted to feel anger — to find blame and hate. But I resolved that when the negative feelings came upon me, I wouldn’t wait for them to grow or fester. I would always turn immediately to the Source of all true power: I would turn to God and let His love and forgiveness protect and save me.”*

Considering her struggle, how petty and small are the daily offenses I endure from children or spouses or co-workers or friends? Doesn’t Immaculée’s situation at least approximate our greatest wounds?

If we are still not yet saints, it is because our way of looking at things is so different from our Good Lord’s way. When a sinner is not reconciled with God, He nevertheless continues to love and call that sinner to repentance. It matters not how many times or how great the sin. When a sinner repents and returns to the Father’s house, He looks on him as an entirely new person—as if nothing had ever happened. We do not have to pretend that injustice is justice or that evil is good. *“When confronted with evil,”* St. Jose Maria Escriva remarks, *“we shall not reply with another evil, but with sound doctrine and good actions: drowning evil in an abundance of good.”*

The Lord urges us today: *“Forget your brothers’ and sisters’ past. If you base your relationships on the past, then who is in the wrong: you or them? You will be the one in the wrong for not having forgiven. You want to go tit for tat – wound for wound – and that is why, little by little, community and peace is broken. I, who am God, want to open the door wide to them, but you insist on keeping it closed. I want to forgive them, but you insist on condemning them. How different my way of seeing is from yours!”*

You and I can never exhaust the meaning of these words. We can only kneel before God and thank him for His merciful love. God refuses to condemn us. He always offers a chance for reconciliation. Every time we brave that confessional box, he’s always quick to forgive the repentant soul.

None of this is humanly easy; neither is anything in a truly Christian life. Anyone who says different sells a false gospel that cannot save. You can *“bear your share of hardship for the gospel with the strength that comes from God”* (2Tim 1:18). *“Choose love”* like Immaculée Ilibagiza. God love you friends+