



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE** *St Peter's Square*

Wednesday, 24 April 2019 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

Today we shall complete the catechesis on the fifth request of the “Lord’s Prayer”, by focusing on the expression “as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Mt 6:12). We have seen that it is actually human to be debtors before God: we have received everything from him, in terms of nature and grace. Our life has not only been wanted, but has been loved by God. Truly, there is no room for presumption when we fold our hands to pray. In the Church there is no ‘self-made man’, men who have created themselves. We are all debtors to God, and to all those people who have given us favourable living conditions. Our identity is built first and foremost with the good received. The first is life.

One who prays learns to say “thank you”. And so often we forget to say “thank you”. We are selfish. One who prays learns to say “thank you” and to ask God to be benevolent to him or her. As much as we may strive, there is always an inexhaustible debt to God which we can never pay back: he loves us infinitely more than we love him. And then, as much as we try to live according to Christian Teaching, in our life there will always be something for which to ask forgiveness. Let us think about days spent lazily, about moments in which rancour has filled our heart, and so on. These unfortunately not rare experiences are what make us implore: “Lord, Father, forgive us our debts”. Thus we ask God for forgiveness.

On close reflection, the invocation could well be limited to this first part; that would have been nice. But instead Jesus joins it to a second expression that forms one with the first. The vertical relationship with benevolence on God’s part refracts and is called to translate into a new relationship with our brothers and sisters: a horizontal relationship. The good God invites all of us to be good. The two parts of the invocation are linked together with a stern conjunction: we ask the Lord to forgive our debts, our sins, ‘as’ we forgive our friends, the people who live with us, our neighbours, the people who have done something bad to us.

Every Christian knows that forgiveness of sins exists for him or her. We all know this: God forgives everything and forgives always. When Jesus describes the face of God to his disciples, he outlines it with expressions of tender mercy. He says that there is more joy in heaven for one sinner who repents than for a multitude of righteous people who need no repentance (cf. Lk 15:7, 10). Nothing in the Gospels lets one suspect that God would not forgive the sins of whoever is ready and asks to be embraced again.

But the Grace of God, so abundant, is always demanding. Those who have received much must learn to give much, and not to keep only for themselves what they have received. Those who have received much must learn to give much. It is not by chance that the Gospel of Matthew, immediately after having given the text of the “Our Father”, of the seven expressions used pauses to emphasize precisely that of fraternal forgiveness: “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Mt 6:14-15). But this is powerful! I recall: several times I have heard people say: “I will never forgive that person! I will never forgive that person for what he did to me!”. But if you do not forgive, God will not forgive you. You close the door. Let us consider whether we are able to forgive or if we do not forgive.

When I was in the other Diocese, a distressed priest told me that he had gone to administer the Last Rites to an elderly woman who was on her deathbed. The poor woman could not speak. And the priest asked her: “Madam, do you repent of your sins?”. The woman said “yes”; she could not confess them, but she said yes. It is sufficient. And then again: “Do you forgive others?”. And the woman said, on her deathbed: “No”. The priest was upset. If you do not forgive, God will not forgive you. Let us consider, we who are here, whether we forgive or whether we are able to forgive. “Father, I cannot do it, because those people treated me so harshly”. But if you cannot do it, ask the Lord to give you the strength to do so: Lord, help me to forgive.

Here again, we find the connection between love of God and love of neighbour. Love attracts love; forgiveness attracts forgiveness. Again in Matthew we find a very strong parable dedicated to fraternal forgiveness (cf. 18:21-35). Let us listen to it.

There was a servant who had contracted an enormous debt with his king: 10,000 talents! An impossible amount to repay; I do not know how much that would be today, but hundreds of millions. However, a miracle happened, and that servant received not a deferred payment but full commutation. An un-hoped for grace! But here, immediately thereafter, that servant got angry with a fellow servant who owed him 100 denari — something minor — and, although this is an attainable sum, he would not accept excuses or pleas. Therefore, in the end, the master called for him and had him condemned. Because if you do not strive to forgive, you will not be forgiven; if you do not strive to love, neither will you be loved.

Jesus includes the power of forgiveness in human relationships. In life not everything is resolved

with justice. No. Especially where one must put a stop to evil, someone must love beyond what is due, in order to recommence a relationship of grace. Evil knows revenge, and if it is not stopped, it risks spreading, suffocating the entire world.

Jesus replaced the law of retaliation — what you have done to me, I will do to you in return — with the *law of love*: what God has done for me, I shall do for you in return! Let us consider today, in this most beautiful week of Easter, whether I am able to forgive. And if I do not feel I can, I must ask the Lord to give me the grace to forgive, because knowing how to forgive is a grace.

God gives every Christian the grace to write a story of good in the life of his or her brothers and sisters, especially of those who have done something regrettable or wrong. With a word, an embrace, a smile, we can pass on to others the most precious thing we have received. What is the most precious thing we have received? Forgiveness, which we too must be able to give to others.

Special Greetings

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, especially those from the United Kingdom, Ireland, Finland, The Netherlands, Sweden, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and the United States of America. In the joy of the Risen Christ, I invoke upon you and your families the loving mercy of God our Father. May the Lord bless you all!

I address a thought to *young people*, to *the elderly*, to *the sick* and to *newlyweds*.

I invoke upon everyone the joy and hope that flow from the Easter of Christ. May you have the experience of the living Jesus, in order to receive the gift of his peace and become his witnesses in the world.