

March 2008 – General Intention

That the Church may continue to spread Christ's love by helping all people to understand the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation between individuals and peoples.

Jesus teaches us to ask God the Father to "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us". Do you remember which prayer includes these words? It's the Our Father of course! One of the most important lessons that Jesus teaches us in the "Our Father" is the lesson of forgiveness. Here Jesus reminds us that we are all in need of forgiveness - we all make mistakes and end up hurting one another and turning away from God. However, God loves us more than anything and is always willing to forgive us our trespasses.



But... in these same words from the Our Father, Jesus lets us in on the big secret to forgiveness. The secret is that unless we are willing to forgive those who trespass against us, we cannot receive God's forgiveness. We pray that God would forgive our sins *as we forgive the sins of others*. This means that if we refuse to forgive, we actually close our hearts to God's grace and forgiveness (CCC 2840).

This is a really amazing secret! When we think of God, we are reminded of His greatness and His power, of how He can do anything and everything. And yet, Jesus tells us that there is one thing that can stand in the way of His power - us. God gives us a choice. If we choose to hold the doors of our hearts tightly shut by refusing to show mercy to others, then God will not force the doors open. He respects our freedom and waits for us to open our hearts to His love.

Most of us find it easy to forgive those that we love, to be kind to those who ask us to forgive them. But what should we do about those people who do not want or deserve our forgiveness? What about the girl or boy who is really, really mean to everyone? This is where the secret of forgiveness is most important. Because God the Father sent Jesus to us that we might be reconciled with Him even while we were still sinners and did not deserve forgiveness, so we must forgive every one, especially those who do not want or deserve forgiveness.

This month we celebrate a wonderful example of forgiveness - St. Patrick. If you recall the story of St. Patrick's life, you will see that he was able to forgive those who took him into slavery and mistreated him, and even return to these same people to tell them the Good News of Jesus love. St. Patrick was able to forgive as God forgives. Let's pray this month that every person would learn the big secret of forgiveness - the more you give away, the more mercy, grace, and love you receive!

Written by Kristy Linnhoff – Copyright 2008

March 2008 – Mission Intention

That Christians who are persecuted because of the Gospel may be sustained by the Holy Spirit and continue to bear witness to the Word of God.

Do you remember what it means to be persecuted? To be persecuted means to be treated badly or even have your life taken away simply because you believe in Jesus Christ. Ever since the beginning of the Church, on the day of Pentecost, some evil people have hated Christians. These mean people have done whatever they could to make the lives of Christians difficult, even to the point of physically harming or killing the faithful.

This might bring to our minds images of the Apostles facing angry mobs of people in ancient Jerusalem. However, did you know that there are many, many Christians today who are suffering persecution for their faith in Jesus Christ and His Church? Think of the Christians in China and North Korea, or the believers in some parts of Africa. Although it is rather easy to be a Catholic Christian in the United States today, in other areas of the world it could cost a person a job, better living conditions, or even worse...

However, if we really think about it, we realize that this situation is not so surprising. In fact, Jesus told us that it would be this way. Before He ascended into Heaven, Jesus told the Apostles, "If the world hates you, realize that it hated me first... Remember the word I spoke to you, 'No slave is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:18-20). Of course, Jesus does not leave us to face persecution without His help and consolation. At Pentecost and through the Sacraments, Jesus gives us His Holy Spirit to make us strong and to give us the courage to always stand up for the faith no matter what the cost.



The Church calls the day of martyrdom a dies natalis (birthday). Indeed, by virtue of Christ's death and Resurrection, the death of the martyr is a birth in Heaven. ...Jesus who was born in Bethlehem gave His life for us so that we too, reborn "from on high" through faith and Baptism, might be willing to give up our own lives for love of our brothers and sisters... Today I would especially like to remember the Christian communities that are suffering persecution and all the faithful who suffer for the faith. May the Lord give them the strength to persevere and the ability to love even those who cause their suffering.

~ John Paul II, Angelus on the Feast of St. Stephen, Dec 2003

Written by Kristy Linnhoff – Copyright 2008