

Doctrinal Session

APPRENTICES IN FAITH: A Resource for the RCIA
Forgive Us Our Trespasses

Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.

1 John 4:20

Insight

George and his next-door neighbor, Hank, had got into a fierce argument that turned into a bit of a scuffle. Words were spoken. Fists flew. And the late-night party taking place in Hank's backyard quickly broke up. That is, as far as George knew.

George didn't wait around to see what would happen next. He took his family home as soon as Hank was on the ground. There was no resolution between George and Hank. The conflict resulted from Hank's making fun of George's daughter, Annie.

The next morning, George felt guilty about it all. He should not have reacted violently. But Hank wouldn't let up. And Annie was there to hear the things he said—all in front of her friends, Hank's kids. The whole situation was unpleasant. George and Hank did not act like the Christian adults they were supposed to be.

Now they found themselves sitting near each other at Mass. Hank and his family hardly ever came to church, but there they were. George realized he shouldn't be startled by it, but Hank sported a pretty good shiner. It made George feel even worse. Now how was he going to participate in Mass, let alone receive Holy Communion when he hadn't yet apologized to Hank?

Additional Background

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 2838–2845

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults: page 488

Compendium—Catechism of the Catholic Church: 594–595

For Reflection . . .

Believers cannot observe and practice the teaching of Jesus only as an external measure of behavior.

What are the concrete steps you engage in so that your heart is formed in the way of Jesus?

Do you think most worshippers on Sunday are hypocritical? Why or why not?

Church Teaching

Of all the lines in the Lord's Prayer, this one is the most amazing, even breathtaking: Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Notice we do not merely beg for forgiveness, we profess and pray to link our own forgiveness from God to the forgiveness we show to others. Forgive us, *as we forgive*.

God will forgive us by the measure with which we forgive others. This petition clarifies for us that while we have received forgiveness from Christ, that generous outpouring of divine mercy cannot penetrate our hardened hearts if we refuse to forgive others who trespass against us. So significant is the notion that Jesus, having taught the Lord's Prayer, returns to it, repeating it as if to underscore it (see Matthew 6:14–15).

God's forgiveness of us is without limit—except the roadblocks or obstacles we ourselves raise. Jesus, in his teaching and by his example, challenges us to put into practice this same unlimited forgiveness. When Peter asks how many times must we forgive others, Jesus responds with a number, seventy-seven, an Old Testament allusion meaning "limitless" (see Genesis 4:24; Matthew 18:21–23). Jesus continues with the parable of the Merciless Servant, which drives home the point that God's forgiveness of us is dependent on how we forgive others (see Matthew 18:23–35).