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Carmelite Spiritual Center

8433 Bailey Road * Darien, Illinois 60561 * 630-969-4141

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Life is Worth Giving

FORGIVENESS IS GOOD FOR THE SPIRIT, AND THE BODY

by Fr. Kevin Shanley, O.Carm.

Most Christians are aware that the act of forgiveness is spiritually ~~very~~ very good for the soul and helps one to grow as a God-loving person. The great examples from both the Old and New Testaments, e.g., the Prodigal Son and other parables, help people to understand the greatness and goodness — and necessity — of Forgiveness. Christians simply are taught not to hold grudges against those who have offended them. Christ in the Lord's Prayer reminds pray-ers that they will be forgiven themselves in the exact same measure as they forgive ~~others~~ others.

Forgiveness, then, is a high priority spiritual value, and one espoused by millions of believers.

What Psychology and Medicine Teach

Now psychology and medicine are teaching people that unless they forgive others, they can actually be hurting themselves. Although anger and resentment are normal ways in which people respond to injustice, letting them take control of our relationships with others could produce a sense of bitterness that can easily lead to a negative view of life. People can then stop trusting all others, just because a few treated them unjustly.

In this way, people can miss out on friendships that could enrich both their social and spiritual lives.

Not forgiving others can also make people at risk for such problems as anxiety, lessened self-esteem, distrust and even hopelessness. And refusing to forgive can also have a negative effect on peoples' ~~immune~~ physical immune system and create problems in the areas of heart, digestive and related parts of the body.

What Forgiveness Can Do

Ultimately forgiveness aids in the creation of a much healthier mental attitude and immune system, greater hopefulness, and even help people to ~~sleep~~ sleep sounder! These benefits far outweigh anything that may be derived from withholding forgiveness from others.

Why is Forgiveness so Difficult?

Once people come to understand that forgiving is difficult for most, they can also reason that it will take both time and effort. First, there must be an intellectual and spiritual decision to offer up anger and feelings of revenge. Secondly, it must not be considered a way to condone someone's very un-Christian behavior, not absolving a person of guilt or the need to seek pardon. A third important point is for those treated unjustly not to make themselves vulnerable to further injustice. The offending people must both seek pardon and re-earn trust.

Fr. Kevin/ LIFE (Forgiveness)/ 3

But it is also not necessary to trust or even like the offending people again in order to live a spiritually and mentally ~~healthy~~ healthful life.

Most importantly, forgiving is not the same as forgetting. It is basically a letting go of anger and determining to ~~maintain~~ continue with one's life.

Denial or attempting to bury one's anger simply doesn't work. It eventually erupts later. Expressing anger, while at times seems helpful, can also cause harm. If great anger has been suppressed for a long time, expressing it at an inappropriate ~~time~~ moment or place can cause serious damage to many relationships.

But people need to acknowledge their anger before deciding that forgiveness is the best way to handle a situation. And this is considering whatever the source of the decision: following Christ in turning the other cheek, avoiding mental or physical side-effects, or simply attempting to walk in the other person's moccasins. Or to remember: To err is human; to forgive is divine!