

### *A Few Short Spiritual Exercises Related to Mercy and Forgiveness*

Before each reflection, ask God for inner calm, freedom from distraction, an open mind and heart. Don't try to pray them all at once. Give the Holy Spirit and yourself time to work with each other. Return to them from time to time. God's graces are renewed and re-presented in varying ways every moment. He never runs out! He'll communicate with us in ways we'll understand! Pray this prayer to the Holy Spirit at the start of each time of prayer:

Holy Spirit, come into my heart, mind, body and soul. Give me the gifts you have for me. I offer no resistance to your will and work in me. I surrender now every obstacle within me which blocks your power and love in me. By your power and strength, I take down and cast away every conscious and unconscious obstacle to your gifts and grace within me. I surrender to you all that is within me. I surrender especially anything that is contrary to your love and will, from whatever source, or time, or age in my life. Holy Spirit, come. Give me your light that I may see as you would have me see, hear as you would have me hear, think and decide as you would have me think and decide. Help me to live a life of deep gratefulness. All I have I give to you, Spirit of life and love. Heal me by your power of infinite love. Loose me from every bond that prevents me from being merciful, patient, loving and forgiving. I pray this and all things to the glory of my Father in heaven, and in the name of my most holy and merciful Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

(From Fr. Robert DeGrandis' book, *Healing the Broken Heart*, we hear a story of a woman who consciously identified only one event in her life that adversely affected her, and one person whom she needed to forgive to be freed from her lack of self respect, openness to and love of others and genuine happiness. After praying the "Forgiveness Prayer," she had a list of 178 people she needed to forgive! She obtained the mercy of being renewed in her own life and spirit by forgiving them.)

First Reflection: Is there anyone in my life who has hurt me and whom I have not asked God to forgive and be merciful to? Are there still memories of pain and hurt associated with that person or time? Can I sincerely pray for the desire to forgive; or at least, the desire to have the desire?

Prayer: Holy Spirit, come upon me and \_\_\_\_\_. Come upon that time in my life when I was \_\_\_\_\_. Help \_\_\_\_\_ to change and to grow in your life and love. In the name of Jesus, with all the strength of will I have by your grace, I forgive \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_.

Second Reflection: Who have I hurt by my sins and selfishness? Who have I used for my own selfish gratification, advancement, enrichment? What relationship is ongoing in my life now which is based on selfishness? What do I call love that isn't?

Prayer: Holy Spirit, give me the gifts of repentance and conversion grounded in truly unselfish love. Give me a heart always to put God first in my love and desire, and the respect and good of others before my own needs and desires. Help me always to be diligently concerned for the spiritual welfare and salvation of everyone you place in my life. (We cannot usually go back in time to make restitution and repair the damage our sins have caused others, but the Holy Spirit can. Pray to the Spirit, and ask him to repair the damage your sins have caused others in any way, in any time of your life. Offer a prayer for this intention every day. It can also be very good

to offer some little act of reparation or penance for this intention—the spiritual healing of everyone you have hurt by your sins.)

Third Reflection: Where, how and with whom am I harsh, critical, impatient, unloving? Does my own inner lack of peace, self respect, self love and happiness spill out on others, or even just in a general, nonspecific way, to spread a spirit of anger and poisonous negativity? Why do I react as I do? What is in my emotional fabric that causes this? What are my habits of thought, and the inner attitude of heart and mind that have become the base that causes my negativity and anger to spring out? (In such reflections it can be helpful to write down the things that come to mind.)

Prayer:

Holy Spirit, shed your light deep into my heart, mind and soul. You have made me good, and you have made me beautiful. My heavenly Father loves me and will never turn away from me or reject me. Help me to grasp the profound and amazing truth that I am his beloved child. Help me to see the good and beauty in myself and others.

Help me to be humble. Help me to consciously root out of the depths of my being harshness, any lack of charity, unjust criticality and rash judgment. Help me to consciously reform my deep attitudes and habits to be quick to spontaneously pray for and think charitably of others.

Help me to understand who I am, and why I am like I am. Then, help me to be gentle, kind, forgiving and merciful to myself. Holy Spirit, I am myself a weak and sinful person, let me not despise others for their weakness. I ask God’s mercy on those whom I see and perceive to sin. I ask you to strengthen all those whose faith is weak.

I ask you to help me be patient and truthful with those who are selfish, unjust, uncharitable and vexing. When I must correct faults, stop injustice, abuse or destructive behavior, let me do that in your strength and for your purpose, always with the good of all in mind, without vindictiveness.

Fourth Reflection: When have I refused help I could give to those in legitimate need? How was I miserly in expressing mercy in my care for another person?

Prayer: Holy Spirit, forgive me for the times I have not been merciful to those in legitimate need. Forgive me for the times I have turned away when I could have helped in some material, financial or spiritual way. Forgive the times that I refused to be merciful by brushing off someone who just needed the warmth, sympathy and understanding of another human being who cared enough to listen, and I was impatient and dismissing of that person. Help me to have real compassion for all I meet, so that your mercy may flow through me as your mercy has flowed through others to me.

(At the conclusion of *all prayer*, thank God for all the blessings he gave you in that prayer. He *always* blesses us when we pray, even when we can’t see or perceive those blessings, or think our prayers haven’t been answered.)



A good prayerful rule and question to bring often to mind and to live by:

***What does Love demand? How am I called by God to be merciful, here and now, in this very moment?***