

On the need to forgive God

A few days ago, I got annoyed with a friend of mine and a few hours after I apologised for my outburst. Fortunately, if friends are willing to both forgive and also ask for forgiveness, when necessary, it actually helps friendship grow in a wonderful way. Indeed, I believe that for any friendship to grow and flourish, mutual forgiveness must be a part of it and should this never happen, then I suspect that the friendship itself would not be worth very much. But, having said that, what about our friendship with God? Is mutual forgiveness also needed there – or even possible? It seems, at first sight, that God could never stand in need of our forgiveness, but I think there are times when we need to forgive him for being God – for seeing, understanding and valuing people and things in a radically different way from us.

I prayed with a young woman recently, whose first born child had only lived for nine and a half hours. She prayed that her child would live, so the question arises: How could God have let that happen? Did he not care? There are some, who have even given up belief in God, because what they see in the world clashes with their ideas about God. If God is so compassionate, then how can he let such awful things happen? I have heard some Christians try to answer this by saying: this is because we did not pray hard enough. Such an answer, however, would portray God as a fickle tyrant – and as Margaret McCarthy somewhat said in “Memories of a Catholic childhood”, if there is such a God and he acts like this – then I would rather not have anything to do with him!

The roots of this dilemma lie in the fact that I have certain ideas of what is good and right and I assume that God sees things in the same way. When he does not, when the opposite of what I pray for actually happens, then I feel hurt, betrayed and rejected. It is immaterial whether God is actually rejecting me or ignoring my prayers, if I feel rejected and abandoned, then that is where I am and I need God to draw near and ask for my pardon, to heal my hurt – and I think he does – he asks pardon that he is God. I remember one occasion, in particular, when I had prayed desperately for something not to happen – but it did happen and my world crashed. I later asked the Lord, “Where were you, when I prayed so desperately for help?” and I heard him answer, “I was on my knees beside you, begging you to let me in, but you were too intent on what you were demanding to listen.” I felt, on that occasion, a hint of sadness that my prayer could not be granted, a sadness that my insight was not deep enough to see what God sees, and this gave me an edge of hope that one day I would understand.

One aspect of this problem lies in the question, “Who am I?” At first sight, the answer to this seems easy: “me is me!”, but when I look a little deeper, I see that I am not just one thing, but a whole constellation of many facets and aspects, all of which come together to make me who I am. There was a time, when I felt very burdened and weighed down by a weakness and fault that I carry and I begged God over and over again to be freed of this, for all it seemed to do was bring destruction. This climaxed on one night, when, on my knees, I had what can only be described as a slanging match with the Lord – telling him that if he was supposed to be Saviour, how come he was not saving me! My anger that night did not allow me to hear any answer to this, but looking back now, I see that if the Lord had taken away that part of me

On the need to forgive God

that was weak, I would not be Terry any more. I would be someone else. And “Terry”, who is the one whom the Lord loves, not the person I wanted him to put in my place.

Our Tradition tells us that God cares for everyone and everything, that, *“He does not break the crushed reed, nor quench the wavering flame” (Is. 42:3)*, no matter how broken, abused or degraded. But it is very difficult for us to see why he cares in this way – and leads them to grow from what is, rather than throwing them away and starting again. You have to be a passionate lover of people and things to see them in this light – and I, at least, in this moment of my life, am not. My instinct is to fix me, to make me new – give up being Terry.

I read a love poem recently in which a man speaks about his wife, who is always accidentally smashing crystal glasses or driving so badly that other drivers go in fear of their lives, but, who is also so gentle with those who are shy or in need. He ends his love poem with this verse:

So, be with me, Darling, early and late. Smash glasses –
I will study wry music for your sake,
For should your hands drop white and empty
All the toys of the world would break.

John Frederick Nims

Only a madly passionate lover, can see who his love truly is. This man does. God does. I, however, so often, miss the mark and that is why I sometimes think God is wrong and find myself in a situation when I need to forgive him for being God.

Diary

I have been having some trouble with my eyes when reading and so decided that it was time for a new pair of glasses. So, I asked a friend of mine, here in Bali, to recommend a good optician and I was impressed with the expertise of the staff there and the variety of spectacles on offer – as good as you would find in Europe. However, I also discovered that they are also just as good as Europe in the prices they charge for new spectacles!

I have finally managed to get into the prison here in Bali. I had heard that three of the Bali Nine, all of whom had been convicted of smuggling drugs into Australia, had received an execution date and this was why I particularly wanted to see them – but fortunately, I discovered that the rumour about an execution date was false.

While I was away in Sarawak in June and July there was a change of regime at the prison and everything was tightened up, including the rules on those who are allowed into the prison - and I, I am told, was one of those considered unsuitable because I am European. I waited while friends at church tried to get this changed, but finally decided on Friday to try to get in to visit as an ordinary visitor. Fortunately, a Balinese friend came with me and managed to explain who I was and why I wanted to see the prisoners and we were let in. I met two of the guys and spent a good hour with the youngest of the Bali Nine, Matthew.

On the need to forgive God

Matthew is 21 years old. He was 17, when arrested and charged with being in possession of drugs and was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment. He appealed against this sentence and it was changed to death. Some people have asked whether they can join in a petition for him and the others. We can, but I would rather wait. Legal appeals are still going on, at the moment, and hopefully they will succeed. Should these eventually fail, however, then we can try a petition of clemency and this has a chance of being more effective because we waited.

I shall be going home in two weeks for a short holiday and so, although it is still raining quite a lot, I decided not to hire a car for these last two weeks, because it is much more expensive to hire one for two week than to hire it for a month. So, I am back on my motor-bike – or, as my nephew Terence irreverently calls me: “the kamikaze kid!”

God bless,

Terry