

PRAY

Loving and creative God, in you all that begins and ends.

Help us see how the gifts you give us can help build peace

among all of good will. Amen.



SPiRIT



Match the people and events below with the phrases that identify them.

1 ___ Builds the Church of the Holy Sepulchre on the site where Jesus was crucified and buried

A 313
Edict of Milan

2 ___ A Christian who converts her husband Clovis, king of the Franks

B 335
Empress Helena

3 ___ A Jesuit missionary who lives as a Hindu holy man in India

C 420
Jerome

4 ___ Convenes the Second Vatican Council to bring the Church into the modern world

D 500
Clothilde

5 ___ Condemned as a heretic for teaching the earth revolves around the sun

E 1545-63
Council of Trent

6 ___ Defines the seven sacraments

F 1608
Roberto de Nobili

7 ___ Translates the bible from Hebrew and Greek into Latin

G 1633
Galileo

8 ___ Emperor Constantine makes Christianity legal

H 1962
John XXIII

RESENTMENT vs. the POWER OF FORGIVENESS

By Connie Fourré

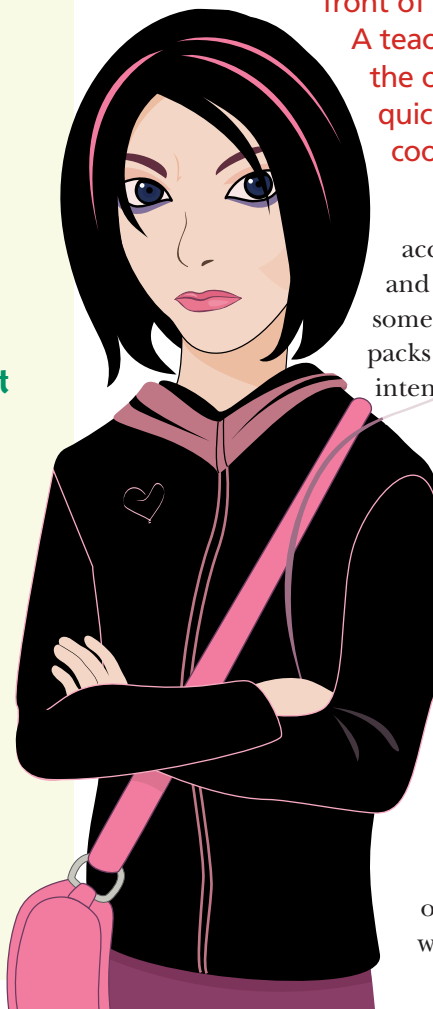


Anger is like fire, flaring up in reaction to threats to our wellbeing. A driver cuts in front of us. I hit my head on a corner. A teacher embarrasses us in front of the class. Anger usually flares up quickly, lasts for a time, and then cools down.

Anger is useful. The adrenaline accompanying anger gives us courage and the energy to push back when someone threatens us. An angry person packs more power in a punch and more intensity in an argument.

Anger also acts as an anesthetic. This painkilling effect helps those who live in a physically threatening environment, where violence is frequent and dangerous. When we are angry we are more able to push through pain and stay in a fight. The same anesthetic suppresses our own sensitivity to the harm we may inflict on someone else.

Most of us have said something in anger and regretted it afterward. Anger temporarily suppressed our awareness of how much our words can hurt another. Acting



out anger can get us in trouble, but anger in itself is a healthy emotion. Resentment, on the other hand, is almost always toxic.

Resentment is suppressed anger, anger without an outlet, anger lying in wait for the next event. Like a smoldering fire that needs only a puff of wind or a bit of new fuel to rekindle its flames, resentment can flare up without warning.

When your sister takes your shirt without asking, or your dad says you can't use the car, underlying resentment can precipitate a major confrontation. On a larger scale, resentment feeds most of the wars that fill our headlines.

Deeper than anger or resentment, hatred can be deadly. Hatred may be hot or cold, but it is always total. When we hate, we block out our awareness of the goodness in others. Hatred makes people capable of terrible acts.

Most of us carry an internal list of grudges. What is yours? Was there a kid in your elementary school who humiliated you or a mean girl who excluded you? How about an older

brother who teased you or lied to you? A younger sister who came along and displaced you? The big kids who made you sit at the back of the bus? A teacher who made you feel you would never learn math? An ex-boyfriend or girlfriend who broke your heart?

Let's say that in each instance you did absolutely nothing wrong and have no responsibility for what happened. Let's say for example an ex-boyfriend cheated on you. He goes to your school and you see him in the hallways—with his new girlfriend. What happens when you see them laughing together?

How does resenting an old injury hurt us? Some people avoid going places where they might encounter a reminder. Some lose friends because others take sides—or refuse to take sides. Hurt from a previous romantic relationship can contaminate the next. Fear and mistrust can cause some people to be suspicious or pick fights, and a promising new relationship turns sour.

Life dishes up a double whammy—the initial hurt and then the lingering aftermath. So often, the person who caused the injury doesn't know or care about the pain he or she left behind. The terrible truth is that the only true path out of the pain is to let go of resentment. It's not fair and terribly hard.

Why is forgiving hard?

We're afraid forgiveness will give the person another shot at us. Resentment and anger protect us from pain. Many of us don't know how to hold boundaries with people unless we're angry. If we let go of the anger, we may let someone who is untrustworthy close to us again, and untrustworthy

people are likely to hurt us. Or we may let someone who is simply human close to us, and humans make mistakes and hurt other humans. (Even we sometimes hurt other people.)

We're afraid forgiving will make us look weak. Letting go of resentment creates vulnerability, but vulnerability is not the same as weakness. We can learn to have boundaries without using anger as a prop.

Some people and some injuries don't deserve forgiveness. Perhaps not, and sometimes we don't deserve to be forgiven. Jesus clearly instructed us to forgive everyone, and he didn't say anything about the other person deserving that forgiveness. It can be hard to admit that sometimes we hold on to resentment because we want to punish the other person a while longer. How much do you learn when someone punishes you? How often does resentment just fuel the fire?

The person is not sorry or hasn't apologized. Forgiving is easier when the other person "gets" what they did wrong and is truly sorry. Unfortunately, resentment costs us whether the other person is sorry or not.

Sometimes we don't want to forgive because we misunderstand forgiveness.

Forgiveness is not the same as saying it's ok. If everything was ok, there would be no need to forgive. Forgiveness is required precisely because the event was hurtful and costly.

Forgiveness doesn't let someone off the hook. True freedom includes the capacity to make bad choices. Forgiveness does not make excuses for people who lie or betray or exploit others. Forgiveness does ask me to have the humility to recognize the ways in which I also hurt others.



SUNDAY GOSPEL

1st Sunday of Advent

When will Jesus come again?

NARRATOR: Jesus spoke to his disciples.

JESUS 1: The coming of the Son of Man will repeat what happened in Noah's time. In the days before the flood people were eating and drinking, marrying and being married, right up to the day Noah entered the ark. They

were totally unconcerned until the flood came and destroyed them.

JESUS 2: So will it be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be out in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal; one will be taken and one will be left. Stay awake, therefore! You cannot know the day your Lord is coming.

JESUS 3: Be sure of this: if the owner of the house knew when the thief was coming he would keep a watchful eye and not allow his house to be broken into. You must be prepared in the same way. The Son of Man is coming at the time you least expect.

Matthew 24:37-44

Forgiving means letting go of whatever it is we believe is owed to us—the apology, the debt. Holding on is like walking through life clutching a brick in our hands.

Go back to the internal resentments most of us carry. What does the person, or God, or the universe, owe you? What exactly do you need to let go of?

An apology goes a long way toward healing a hurt and healing a relationship. Some apologies are better than others. We all recognize a bad apology when we see one, except perhaps when we're doing the apologizing.

I'm sorry but.... "I'm sorry but" usually boils down to "really, you started it" or "it's actually your fault." A good apology takes clear responsibility for our part in a problem. A really clean apology simply states our regret for our own actions.

A bad apology is insincere. We read body language. We search others' eyes and facial expressions, listen carefully to their tone of voice, to gauge the honesty of their speech. An insincere apology doesn't heal. A sincere apology carries a meaningful intention to change.

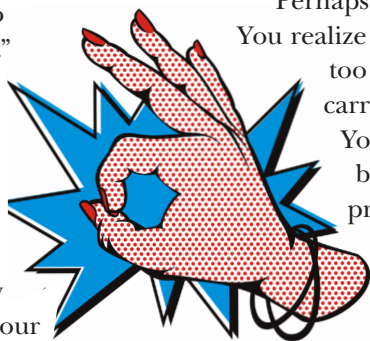
A real apology takes responsibility for an action. "I'm sorry you're upset" doesn't really mean anything. A vague apology occurs when a person hasn't done the work to understand a problem or is trying to dodge responsibility. Sometimes we need to listen hard before we know what to apologize for.

Perhaps you're willing to forgive. You realize resentment is costing too much. You're tired of carrying the load around. You've even tried to forgive, but you can't seem to make progress. A prayer strategy can help.

Jesus told us to pray for our enemies. Prayer which moves us toward forgiveness simply asks God to bless the person. Period. Amen. Don't rehearse all the ways the person should change to your liking. Perhaps ask God to bless the person in all the ways you want to be blessed.



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QUESTIONS

- 1 What is good about anger?
- 2 What is dangerous?
- 3 Why is resentment always toxic?
- 4 What reasons for not forgiving do you think are most common?
- 5 What makes a real apology?
- 6 Why do you think the prayer strategy might work?
- 7 How does Jesus come to us in our daily relationships, in our resenting, letting go, and forgiving?
- 8 To what issues in our world have you awakened in the last year?
- 9 How does Jesus' birth change the world?

Envisioning peace

by Anna Zaros

Advent begins the new liturgical year. The word *advent* means *coming*. Advent is the season that prepares us for celebrating Jesus' comings among us—first as his birth in Bethlehem, ultimately at his second coming in glory, and today in every Eucharist and every person.

During the season of Advent we prepare and wait for Jesus with great anticipation because as Christians we believe that the birth of Jesus will bring renewal to the earth. With Jesus comes new hope for the salvation of humanity.

Hope for a renewed, peaceful world is not new. In this Sunday's first reading we learn about the prophet Isaiah and his description of Israel's ancient longing for peace.

As a prophet, Isaiah spoke for God to the king and the people of Israel for more than 40 years (742-700 B.C.). In his lifetime Assyria became a superpower, defeated the northern kingdom of Israel, destroyed its orchards and olive trees, and brought in new settlers. In Sunday's first reading, Isaiah envisions nations no longer studying war but "walking in the light of God."

In the days to come
the mountain of God's house
shall be established
as the highest mountain
and shall be raised above the hills.
All the nations will stream to it.

Many people will come and say,
"Come, let us go up
to the mountain of God,
to the house of the God of Jacob,
that the Holy One
may teach us God's ways
and that we may walk in God's path."

For from Zion
shall go forth instruction:
the word of the Holy One,
from Jerusalem.
God will judge between nations
and arbitrate for many peoples.

Nations will beat their swords
into plowshares,
their shears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not raise sword
against nation, neither
shall they learn war any more.

Isaiah 2.1-5

In this image Isaiah envisions the low hill on which the temple stands in Jerusalem as Earth's highest mountain—an Everest of peace. He imagines the peoples of the whole world streaming up its paths to learn the way of peace. He hopes for a time when nations will no longer have a need for weapons like spears and swords, but will instead turn them into tools for farming.

Isaiah's ancient image is still relevant today. Numerous wars and violent conflicts among and within nations continue to plague the world's peoples. Today many peace activists use this passage from Isaiah as a rallying cry for change, "We are going to study war no more!" Our Catholic Church, drawing on the wisdom of Isaiah and other biblical teachings, calls for peace among nations and an end to war in our world.

While an end to war is an important goal, Isaiah's image also indicates the need for peace among people. In his image, not only do nations cease fighting, but individual people choose to walk in God's path of peace. For true peace to come about in our world an absence of fighting

A firm determination to respect the dignity of other individuals and peoples along with the deliberate practice of friendliness are absolutely necessary for the achievement of peace.

Catechism of the Catholic Church #1914-1915

is not enough, instead we need what peace studies scholars call a "positive peace."

To have positive peace means that there is an absence of all forms of violence, not only physical violence, whether that be discrimination or inequality, or forms of psychological violence. A treaty that stops a violent war brings about an incomplete peace as long as people in that country are still suffering from poverty or oppression.

A positive peace can be brought about when there is an end to injustice, inequality, and discrimination in all aspects of society. When the world attains positive peace, all humans will be able to flourish to their fullest potential.

Positive peace starts with each person. We can mirror the world we would like to see in our personal relationships. Being just and loving towards people we encounter in our daily lives, like friends and family, is the first step in spreading peace throughout the world.

Building peace in Isaiah's time was a monstrous, but with God's help, possible task; this is still the same today. To achieve peace, we have to work both in ourselves and in our common life in the world.

FAITH in ACTION

1 Imagine peace for 15 seconds. Who makes peace? What activities do peaceful people do? What are their tools? Their industries? **2** Imagine what a positive peace would look like. How is this image different from when you are asked to imagine peace? **3** Imagine war. Who makes it? What activities do people at war do? What are their tools? Their industries? **4** Share your peace and war imaginings in groups of three or four. Which does your group imagine most easily and in most detail? Why?