

7. January 2024

**Solemnity of the Holy Family
Bear with and forgive one another**

In the traditional calendar, today is the Feast of the Holy Family. Our meditation today will therefore be based on the reading for this feast. If any of our listeners would like to hear a meditation for the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord according to the new liturgical calendar, you can find it at the following link:

<http://en.elijamission.net/the-baptism-of-the-lord/>

Col 3:12-17

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

This reading for the Feast of the Holy Family is full of wise admonitions and instructions from the Apostle to the Gentiles. Almost every sentence is worthy of reflection in order to help us live a truly Christian life in imitation of Christ. The Apostle wants to lead the flock entrusted to him along the path of holiness, because only in this way will the Christian life shine with the splendour of divine goodness and become a great light in this world.

Let us look first at the exhortation to forgive one another. Forgiveness is one of the most beautiful gifts we can give each other in the Spirit of the Lord. It leads us to give up the accusations we may have in our hearts against the other, which are like a "debt account" to which we can fall back in certain situations. These accusations poison us internally

and prevent us from growing in love. Moreover, they do not really liberate the other person.

Here we are invited to enter God's school to learn from Him forgiveness and an attitude of pardon. In fact, the Lord Himself constantly offers us His forgiveness. The sacrifice of the Cross was completed and opened the door to eternal life for people of all times. But this infinite gift can only be effective if we accept it and allow the river of God's love to flood our souls. The same happens when a person has really done us an injustice. Only when they become aware and ask for forgiveness does it open the way for them to be able to accept our forgiveness, with the love and freedom it brings. But even if we do not yet see an open door for reconciliation, we can educate our heart in such a way that, on our part, we get rid of everything that prevents us from forgiving. In this way, our heart remains open to reconciliation and the other person will find it easier to take the necessary steps on his or her side.

Our model is the Lord, who is always ready to pour out His compassion and love on us, and does not hold anything against us when we humbly approach Him for forgiveness.

If we have difficulties, because perhaps our heart is deeply wounded by what we have suffered at the hands of a person, then it is important to present this inner wound to the Lord again and again with the blockages that may result from it, and to ask the Holy Spirit to touch us and grant us His light. If we do this with perseverance, we will notice that perhaps the hardnesses in our hearts begin to dissolve and we become more willing to forgive.

The Apostle Paul also exhorts us to enlarge our hearts by bearing with one another. This is a great task because it means that we have to open our hearts wide to love. At the same time, it is also an inner schooling not to be immediately carried away by negative feelings and reactions that arise. Of course, the admonition to bear with one another does not mean that we have to passively accept all the really difficult things that the other person causes us - and which could well be changed - and let them eat away at us from within, turning our soul into a kind of "powder keg" that can explode at any moment. In the same way, things or experiences that we have not overcome spiritually can make us sick inside and weigh us down all the time.

Bearing with one another does not mean that we must always refrain from pointing out to the other person those attitudes that are really a burden to others, if he or she is in a position to change them. But this must be done in a spirit of fraternity, so that it is a true "correctio fraterna". Again, the Lord is our model for how to relate to one another properly. This means growing in love and learning to look at the other with the eyes of love. Bearing with one another is related to long-suffering, which is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. When we notice how much the Lord endures with us without ever withdrawing His love and attention, we will understand that our hearts need to be enlarged.

It is too easy for negative feelings to arise in us, making us impatient with our neighbour. As a result, we often forget that we too are a burden for others to bear. If we constantly go to the Lord's school of love and ask the Holy Spirit to teach us how to deal with the other person, He will show us very clearly when we should simply endure in silence and when it is appropriate to correct in a spirit of fraternal charity, how to practice patience, how to resolve our inner tensions.