

# Spiritual Work of Mercy

## To Forgive Offenses Willingly

(Forgive all Injuries – A Meditation on the Sixth Spiritual Work of Mercy)  
excerpts from Msgr. Charles Pope – June 09, 2015



St. Maria Goretti

### *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

*Christian prayer extends to the forgiveness of enemies, transfiguring the disciple by configuring him to his Master. Forgiveness is a high-point of Christian prayer; only hearts attuned to God's compassion can receive the gift of prayer. Forgiveness also bears witness that, in our world, love is stronger than sin. The martyrs of yesterday and today bear this witness to Jesus. Forgiveness is the fundamental condition of the reconciliation of the children of God with their Father and of men with one another (CCC 2844).*

### *Sacred Scripture*

*But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? (Matthew 5:44-46)*

**Forgiveness is a concept that is often misunderstood.** Many people interpret it to mean that they must stop having negative feelings about something that happened to them, or toward someone who hurt them. Many also think of forgiveness as a work they must do out of their own power, rather than as a gift to be received from God. No! Forgiveness is a work of God within us, whereby He acts to free us from the poisonous effects of bitterness and grief that often accompany the harm that was inflicted upon us.

**Forgiveness is letting go of the need to change the past.** Obviously, we cannot change the past; we cannot change what has happened. But we too easily think that ruminating over past hurts will somehow change what happened or even “get back at” the other person. It will not. Refusing to forgive is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die. Clinging to our hurt and anger, understandable though it may be, only harms us.

**In the family and in the wider community as well, forgiving injuries is a work of mercy,** since it breaks the cycle of anger and retribution that often tears families, communities, and nations apart. It is a restorative work that knits together ties that have frayed.

**This is a great work of mercy indeed.** In moments of grave harm it may be difficult to access, but always pray for this gift. Almost nothing is more poisonous, both to us and others, than festering anger and resentment. Thus, to forgive injuries is a great, healing gift to receive from God and share with others. Ah, the beauty of mercy!

*“Yes, I forgive him and want him to be in Paradise with me some day.”*

# To Forgive Offenses Willingly

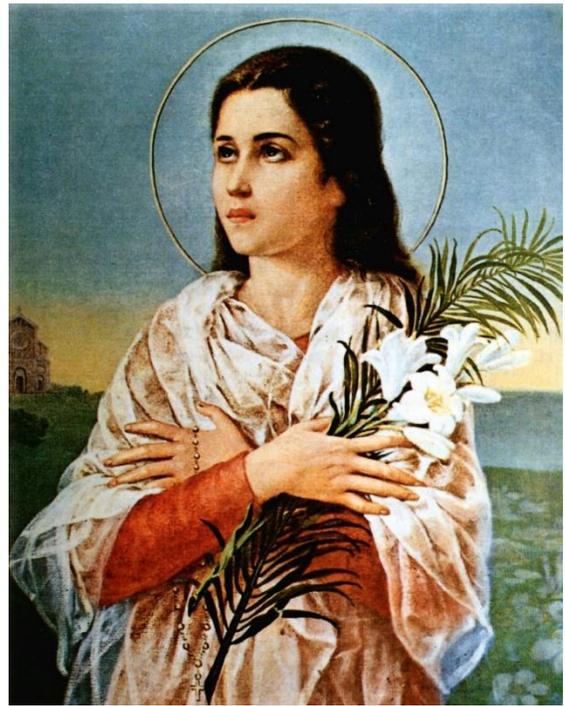
## St. Maria Goretti

### Fast Facts:

Born	•October 16, 1890
Feast Day	•July 6
Canonized	•June 24, 1950 by Pope Pius XII
Quote	• <i>“He loves, He hopes, He waits. Our Lord prefers to wait Himself for the sinner for years rather than keep us waiting an instant.”</i>

### Her Life:

- The third of seven children, Maria was born in 1890 in Corinaldo in Italy.
- By the time Maria had turned six, her family was forced to give up their farm, move to Colle Gianturco, and work for other farmers.
- In 1899 they had to move again to Le Ferriere, where they lived in another building shared with the Serenelli family.
- Soon after, Maria’s father became sick and died of malaria.
- Maria and her siblings worked in the fields to support their family.
- On July 5, 1902, an eleven year-old Maria was sewing one of Alessandro Serenelli’s shirts.
- Alessandro found Maria and threatened her with a knife, intending to rape her.
- Maria fought desperately against Alessandro, claiming that he would be guilty of mortal sin and she did not want him to go to hell.
- Alessandro then choked and stabbed Maria fourteen times.
- Maria was found by her family and sent to a hospital in Nettuno, where she underwent surgery without anesthesia.
- The following day, Maria died of her injuries.
- Alessandro was apprehended shortly after the attack and sentenced to thirty years in prison.



- Three years after his incarceration, he was visited by Bishop Blandini.
- After this visit, Alessandro had a vision of Maria appearing to him, forgiving him, and giving him lilies.
- Alessandro converted immediately. After his release, he sought out Assunta, Maria’s mother, and begged her forgiveness.
- Assunta forgave Alessandro. They attended Mass together the next day, receiving communion side-by-side.
- Alessandro was able to attend Maria’s canonization in 1950.
- He later became a laybrother of the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin, until he died in 1970.

### *How is St. Maria Goretti a model for living out the Spiritual Work of Mercy – Forgive Offenses Willingly?*

Maria’s life was marked by prayer and devotion. Though she and her family were very poor, they were very faithful to our Lord. Even after being attacked by a man with the worst intentions, she still sought to protect his soul and even forgave him after he inflicted terrible injuries on her.

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## *Practices to Foster growth in how to Forgive Offenses Willingly*

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- **Read a passage of Scripture that give examples of *Forgiving Offenses Willingly*. Re-read the passage and pick a word or phrase that stood out for you.**
  - Isaiah 43:25-26
  - Matthew 6:14-15
  - Matthew 18:21-22
  - Luke 15:11-32
  - 1 John 1:9
  - Colossians 3: 12-17
- **Catechetical Texts that speak to *Forgiving Offenses Willingly*:**
  - This "as" is not unique in Jesus' teaching: "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect"; "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful"; "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another." It is impossible to keep the Lord's commandment by imitating the divine model from outside; there has to be a vital participation, coming from the depths of the heart, in the holiness and the mercy and the love of our God. Only the Spirit by whom we live can make "ours" the same mind that was in Christ Jesus. Then the unity of forgiveness becomes possible and we find ourselves "forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave" us (CCC 2842).
  - This exhortation is completely permeated by words which Peter had heard from Jesus himself and by ideas which formed part of his "good news": the new commandment of love of neighbor; the yearning for and commitment to unity; the beatitudes of mercy and patience in persecution for the sake of justice; the repaying of evil with good; the forgiveness of offenses; the love of enemies. In these words and ideas is the original and transcendent synthesis of the Christian ethic or, more accurately and more profoundly, of the spirituality of the new covenant in Jesus Christ ([\*Reconciliatio et Paenitentia\*](#): John Paul II, 1984).
- **Name some people from the Bible or saints who lived out the Spiritual Work of Mercy, *To Forgive Offenses Willingly*.**
  - Examples: (The Father of the Prodigal Son, St. Dymphna, St. Jane Frances de Chantal, St. Josephine Bakhita, Pope St. John Paul II, )
- **Ask the Lord how he is calling you to live out the Spiritual Work of Mercy, *To Forgive Offenses Willingly*.**