Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



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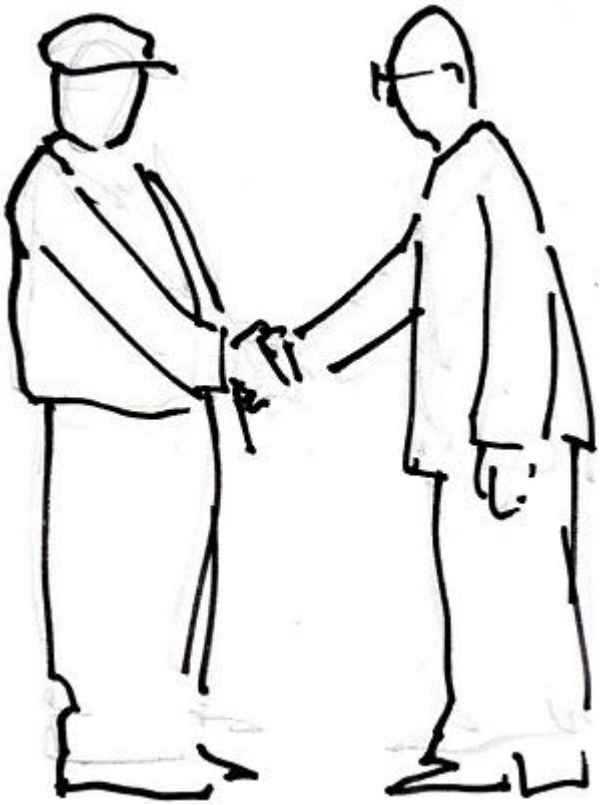

“Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant, as I had pity on you?” (Matt18:34).

Dn 3:25, 34-43: *Mt 18:21-35*

A Russian-speaking friend once told me that the word *Proshchayte* for “Goodbye” literally means “Forgive me.”

It is a lovely Dostoevskian thought, a whole world running on constant forgiveness, every encounter, every relationship cleared of any shadow of regret or offense as millions of people make their way through another day of stubbed toes and hurt feelings.

War reverses this flow of forgiveness, pressing people to hate some faceless enemy they are told hates them and wants to do them harm or has done something to insult their national pride. War is for many ordinary people a costly, patriotic abstraction that sustains a conflict for other reasons, mostly economic or political. How many ordinary Russians would rather be reconciled with their Ukrainian neighbors if given the chance than be ensnared in a pitiably self-destructive war?

Forgiveness is the key that unlocks the Kingdom of God in our hearts. It sets everyone free of the slow drag of defensiveness and rationalization that robs us of creative energy to simply live. Once we recognize each other as flawed human beings in constant need of mercy and generosity, we can be about the business of doing our best, starting over each day, mending the world as we go.

Jesus’ parable about a man who is forgiven a huge debt and then bears down on another man who owes him a pittance is a masterpiece of Kingdom logic. Forgiveness is God’s constant attitude toward us. As Pope Francis has said, “God never tires of offering us forgiveness; it is we who tire of seeking it.” Lack of repentance or forgiveness on our part blocks the flow of love through the entire web of relationships that holds us in existence. That blockage narrows our ability to receive love or pass it on to one another. We stop living when we stop forgiving.

What if today were International Forgiveness Day? Imagine a world in which everyone forgave one other person. We can make it our own day to clear the books of old hurts and resentments, a day on which we get up the courage to reopen a “cold case” when a friendship fell victim to misunderstanding or communication stopped. Better to say “Forgive me” than simply “Goodbye.”