

Love Thy Neighbour

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MUTUAL CHARITY

1. "You shall love your neighbour as yourself."

Is it not remarkable that seven of the Ten Commandments relate directly to my relations with my fellowmen? I am to honour and obey my parents and lawful superiors; I am to respect the character, the person and the worldly goods of my neighbour. That is the summary of my duties to others. And Our Lord epitomises the Ten Commandments in the two great Precepts of the Law 'You shall love the Lord your God... and your neighbour as yourself.' 'Love.' says Saint Paul, 'is the fulfilling of the law.'

It is interesting to compare the accounts given by Saints Matthew, Mark and Luke of the occasion upon which Our Lord quoted the Law as written in the Book of Leviticus. He had 'not come to destroy the law, but to fulfil it.' And He wished to point out especially two essential duties – those to God and those to our fellowmen.

Saint Matthew, before relating the incident I am about to consider, says: 'The multitudes were in admiration at His doctrine. But the Pharisees, hearing that He had silenced the Sadducees, came together, and one of them, a doctor of the law, asked Him, tempting Him: "Master, which is the greatest Commandment of the law?" Jesus said to him: "You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart and with your whole soul and with your whole mind! This is the greatest and the first Commandment. And the second is like to this: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend the whole law and the prophets".'

Saint Mark's account reads: "And there came one of the scribes that had heard them reasoning together; and, seeing that He had answered well, asked Him which was the first Commandment of all. And Jesus said: 'You shall love your God... and your neighbour as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.' And the scribe said to Him: 'Well, Master, You have said in truth that there is one God... and that He should be loved with the whole heart... and to love one's neighbour as one's self is a greater thing than all holocausts and sacrifices'. And Jesus, seeing that he had answered wisely, said to him: 'You are not far from the kingdom of God'."

Saint Luke says: "A certain lawyer stood up, tempting Him, saying: 'Master, what must I do to possess eternal life?' But He said to him: 'What is written in the law: How read you?' He, answering said: 'You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart and your neighbour as yourself.' And He said to him: 'You have answered right. This do; and you shall live.' But he, willing to justify himself, said to Jesus: 'And who is my neighbour?' (Luke 10: 25 and following)"

A very important question, receiving a reply, which can leave no possible doubt as to who my neighbour is. For now follows the Parable of the Good Samaritan; and, by its teaching, I learn that all mankind are my neighbours – from my closest friend to the stranger I pass heedlessly by.

‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ Our Lord did not merely say: ‘You shall love your neighbour’; but: ‘You shall love your neighbour as (you do love) yourself.’

How do I love myself?

Well, I am careful of my creature comforts in the first place. I cherish my body, I clothe it becomingly, I nourish it and keep it in good health. I like to have a pleasant time. I pick out the easiest way to tread. I am self-indulgent. I have a great respect for my own opinion. I am very touchy about what others think and say of me, always on the look out for slights, ready to resent unkindness and criticism. I have a proper pride in my reputation, I am jealous of my good name; if it is called in question, I flare up indignantly. If I am maligned, I give back as good as I get; if I am gossiped about, I soon tell the tale-bearers what I think about them. I take good care that my actions will not be misrepresented; I seek praise when I have done well. I love to be sought after, to be popular and admired. Yes, I have a great affection for myself, and I am ready to go to any amount of trouble to secure my personal safety and well-being.

I must consider my neighbour’s temporal well-being, for I am concerned about my own. I may not turn a deaf ear to the cry of the poor.

If I take the easier path, I must move aside a little and let my neighbor share it with me. If I avoid trouble, I must not put it upon another. If I am touchy about my good name, resentful of malice and criticism, I must resent and put a stop to my unkind chattering about my fellows. Instead of tearing the character of absent persons to pieces, I must defend them, as I should wish them to defend me in my absence. If a friend of mine does well, I must seek to be the first to say; ‘Well done.’ I must crush that mean spirit of jealousy in my heart. If I admire my own qualities so much, surely I will discover many more to esteem in others. As I am ready to take infinite trouble for myself, I must be prepared to take it for my fellow creatures – that is, if I really wish to regulate my life by the great Precept.

In short, I must love my neighbour as myself; and it looks as if the more I love myself, the more I must love my neighbour.

But how do I really follow my Saviour’s command? I hardly follow it at all. I indulge in unkind conversation, gossip, harsh criticism; I judge rashly, I look at the worst side; I bear tales, I give scandal.

And I tell myself that I have ‘nothing to say’ when I go to Confession! Let me give my conscience a bit of examination on these points.

2. Ordinary Conversation.

The ordinary conversation of the average person is not interesting. I travel by train and bus; people are talking on all sides. I walk down the street; stray sentences catch my ear. I sit in a restaurant; a perfect babel of conversation rises everywhere.

What are people talking about? It might be instructive to ‘listen in.’

Sometimes about money, how someone has made a good bargain, how another has been ‘done’; perhaps the usual grumble about expenses and high prices. Others discuss ailments and operations; others, again, the domestic problem, the scarcity of help in the home, the unsatisfactory maid, the troublesome employee.

Practically always people are discussing their fellow creatures. What is my chief topic of conversation? Is it about my neighbour? And, if so, is it upon their best side that I prefer to dwell?

I am afraid that I look upon unkind talk as a very minor venial sin; I do not bother about the sharp criticism and uncharitable remarks I continually make. I may not intend to be deliberately unkind, but my whole attitude to my neighbours is censorious – trying to catch them out in some fault, hastily summing up my own idea of their actions. I do not set out to find good, rather am I ready to pounce upon any evil I can find in others – needless to say, not in myself.

If I submitted my own conscience to as searching a scrutiny as that to which I subject the characters of even my dearest friends, my Confessions would be far more thorough. This habit of constant carping, always saying the worst of my acquaintances, harshly condemning whatever they do, is a sin which does my own character a great deal of harm. It leaves me with a smug feeling of satisfaction that I am not as others – like the Pharisee of the Parable. It makes me hard: there is no pity in my heart for the weaknesses of my fellows.

Have I no weaknesses of my own? I carefully cover them up, and fancy that no one notices them. I don't admit them even to myself, I am so busy thinking of So-and-So's failings.

Censoriousness leads me to be unfair in my judgement: it makes me biased.

It weakens my love of God. How can I feel any warmth of devotion when I am despising my fellow creatures: the work of my Creator's Hands?

How common is this sin of unkind talk, how frequent the cruel gossip, the unjust criticism. How I sin by my tongue – that tongue which was given me with which to converse happily with others, to sing the praises of my God. Above all, that tongue upon which my Saviour Himself so often rests.

I am afraid my ordinary conversation is about my neighbour, and it is neither kind nor gentle. The world applauds a sharp wit, the smart criticism, and I like to please the world. When people laugh at my spiteful humour and my little biting remarks, I am pleased.

Why do I look for the worst in people? If I went to buy groceries, I wouldn't ask for inferior goods: I would look for the best.

And if I know something unpleasant in the character of another, why do I drag it out and chatter over it and tear it to pieces like a dog with a savoury bone?

Isn't there something radically wrong in myself? My mind must be empty if I can't discuss anything but the foibles of those about me. Is there nothing more interesting to talk about?

We all desire to be loved; but the bitter-tongued critic, the tale-bearer, cannot be popular, however much he may cause amusement for the time being.

I know how I shrink from criticism: how carefully I avoid those who have sharp cruel tongues.

Am I one of those who never have anything good to say of their neighbour? Maybe I am too quick to blame, too slow to praise, too ready to join in unkind talk, too prompt to say: 'I told you so.'

Do I look upon the idle word as a pebble cast heedlessly into the pond? It scarcely disturbs the surface, but if I watch, I see the circles widen and widen over the circumference of the water till the whole is troubled. So an unkind word, idly whispered, may spread its mischief into the

consciousness of others, until it is exaggerated and twisted as the images in the water are distorted by its movement.

If I reflect the love of God in the mirror of my soul, my thoughts will be kindly and will lead to kindly speech and charitable conversation.

3. Criticism.

I pride myself upon my intuition; I boast that I can sum up a character swiftly. If I meet new acquaintances, I can make a very shrewd guess at 'their qualities'. I am not deceived by an agreeable exterior; no one can take me in; I see through all that veneer.

And what do I see? Something far from pleasing, of course, I pick out the faults, which no one else ever discovered: I could tell at once that So-and So wasn't to be trusted. I knew very well that someone else wasn't half as clever as he was made out to be. I am proud of my shrewdness, and I am quite as bad (if not worse) as any Pharisee. For, if I am honest, I shall realize that my criticism of the characters of others nearly always tends to be unkind. Instinctively, I look for the worst: not for the best.

I am first rate at 'damning with faint praise.' I regard the efforts of others with a tolerant smile at best. I am only too willing to point out how things could be improved. If I don't exactly say so, I imply it.

I am never satisfied with the work done – how much better I could have done – by others: there is always a 'but' in my commendations. I hold the opinions of my neighbours in a certain contempt. I condescend to the great arts of Music, Literature, Painting, et cetera; but there is always some defect that I can point to, which no one has noticed before. I am critical about my best friends; even in my parents, there are qualities I could improve upon.

But I am not critical of myself. In those minutes before Confession, which ought to be so quietly self-revealing, I hurry through my Examination of Conscience, glossing over my lapses, dwelling rather upon the faults which are easiest to admit and which hurt my self-respect least, in no way critical of my many sins against Charity.

If I took myself to task as sternly as I take even my most admired friend, those precious moments spent with my Lord in the close embrace of Holy Communion would make me sink into the depths of His kind Heart with shame and love in their revealing light.

Who am I to make myself judge? Our Lord has said: 'Judge not and you shall not be judged.' Do I ever give a thought to that dreadful day when I shall stand before my Judge to render an account not only of my deeds, but of my thoughts and words?

If I myself dread critics and fly from their presence, knowing that their opinion of me will be unfavourable, that they will see through all my little vanities and pick holes in my small triumphs, let me realize that that is exactly what I do to others. The coat looks very different when it is turned inside out; the shoe pinches when it is on the wrong foot.

But when I think of criticism, I must not forget that it can be both constructive and destructive. The latter is what I practise; the former I should welcome with thankfulness and humility. And if I am called upon to judge the actions of others, let my verdict be just, merciful and helpful.

4. Gossip.

Gossip is rarely kindly. Even if it isn't actually sinful, it is at best silly.

The empty mind loves to pick up tit-bits of information, chatter over them and pass them on. Inveterate gossips are as greedy for stories of their neighbours as gluttons are for savoury morsels.

They pounce on the most trivial incident, any bit of news for which their eager ears are ever on the alert. The joy of listening, the delight in repeating, for 'Those that itch to know, ache to tell.'

It goes without saying that the tale loses nothing in the telling. I find an unkind twist in it; I give it another, my hearers, probably, do the same. If I heard the same story recounted a week later, I should not recognize my handiwork.

It grows and grows like a snowball – would that it would melt as swiftly!

Gossip is petty; only the idler can indulge in it freely. It is so often spiteful, and it is mean, because the persons I talk about are not there to defend themselves. It is like 'hitting a man when he is down.'

There doesn't seem to be any end to it, and what makes it so dangerous is that there is invariably exaggeration. Who can tell a plain tale without embroidering it? So Truth is set at naught.

I think that the sin of detraction leads very easily to calumny, because, when I have discovered the possibly well known defects of my neighbour, I am very tempted to add a bit more in order to make my narration more interesting.

So gossip denies the words of the Psalmist: 'Mercy and Truth have met together; Justice and Peace have kissed each other.'

Mercy, truth, justice and peace are far from the lips of the gossip. Hard, false, unfair and provoking I am when I indulge in idle chatter. I may say I do not intend any harm: I only meant to be amusing, I merely repeat what I have heard (with a very slight addition); others are far worse than I; and, after all, I had the story on the best possible authority, and I made my listeners promise it wouldn't go any further. I have plenty of excuses; but the harm is done. One cannot recall the spoken word.

I should take myself severely to task in this respect. I am well aware that theft can become a grave sin; is it less grave to steal my neighbour's character? I may be able to restore the goods, I have purloined; can I, with the same facility, restore the good name of one whose honour I have defamed? My reputation is more precious to me than my worldly goods; so is that of my neighbour's dearer than anything they possess. And I rob them of it by my malicious tongue; and plunge yet deeper into sin as I let Truth go to the wall in order to receive the flattering laughter of idle listeners.

Let me abjure the trivial tittle-tattle of every day. The world is full of marvels and beauty – my own existence is full of incident – there is interest everywhere.

Can't I talk about things rather than people? Or if I must talk about my neighbour, can't I for a change, pass on some pleasant anecdote that will show him in a favourable light?

5. Two Points of View.

There are two sides to every question – the cloud and its silver lining – right and wrong.

'Did you notice that woman sitting over there?' I heard someone ask once.

“You mean the one with the scar on her face?” “The one with the lovely golden hair?” was the response she got.

‘Rain, rain.’ grumbled another. ‘It hasn’t stopped raining all day.’ ‘Didn’t you notice the rainbow?’ inquired her friend.

Two points of view.

There are those who will always draw out the sweetness of life, who seek beauty and overlook what is pleasing; there are those whose eye will always fall upon the scar rather than upon the golden hair.

Which do I do? Do I look for the good in my neighbours, and, when I have found it, do I, like the woman in the Gospel story who has recovered her goat, ‘rejoice’? Do I, as the man in the parable with his ten talents, ‘trade with them,’ till I magnify the virtue I have discovered? Have I the knack of bringing out the best in others?

Or do I regard the seamy side – hoping for the best, but expecting the worst? Do I watch the rain and forget to look for the rainbow?

Most people respond to tolerance: do I give it? If my usual point of view is pessimistic, my judgement of others will tend to take the less favourable view, and I will see their faults before I see their good qualities. And everyone has plenty of both.

If I am a cheerful optimist, I can’t be really unkind, and my opinion of my fellows will be hopeful and I will expect to find good in them.

I once went to call upon two sisters. The elder, as she met me on the threshold, said: ‘Don’t brush against the door and spoil my fresh paint.’ The other, as she let me out of the house later, said: ‘Don’t brush against the fresh paint and spoil your good coat.’

I have often thought about that small incident.

Two points of view – mine and yours.

Sometimes I may have to give up my point of view and accept that of another. If I must, it should be done generously, not in a niggardly manner. I am a human individual with a right to my own outlook; but I have to consider the outlook and individuality of my neighbour. There must be give and take. Life is unbearable without kindness. The world today is hard and cold: there is little love amongst us. We are all out for ourselves. I pursue my own, doggedly, treading rough-shod on the feelings of others to get what I want. I pass on relentlessly towards my goal regardless of those who fail and faint by the way. I carry on. Someone else can see to them; it isn’t my job. I have to get on.

I only see one point of view – my own. I take care that my newly-painted door doesn’t suffer – my neighbour’s coat doesn’t matter. I am single-minded in this: that I am going to have my own way, no matter at whose expense.

There is my point of view.

But there is God’s. What does He think of me and of the life I am at present leading? Is He satisfied that I am making due use of the countless graces He showers upon me? He has not placed me alone in this world; He expects me, by the law of charity, to give a helping hand to my neighbour. If I may say so, He looks to me to assist Him in His work among my fellow-creatures.

I am to look at things from His point of view – to regard my neighbours with His kind Eyes. They are His children, too; if I hurt them, I hurt Him.

I see only the rain; He sees the rainbow. I look upon the scar: He gazes upon the golden hair.

Two points of view – kindness and harshness; the optimist, the pessimist; the light, the shadow; the best, the worst. God's view and mine. Which is the better?

6. Rash Judging.

How quick I am to form a low opinion of others, to put a sinister interpretation upon their actions, to read a hidden meaning in their words. How harshly I judge!

If I hear some scandal breathed, my impulse is to believe it at once; for I am on the look-out for the faults of my neighbours and am ready to credit them with any breach of good behaviour.

If I do not meet a certain individual at Sunday Mass, I jump to the conclusion that he wasn't there; if I hear that another has made a good business deal, I am inclined to believe that it couldn't have been done honestly; if I miss a trinket or a sum of money, I conclude that it has been stolen.

Yes, if I meditate upon my reactions to the daily events of life, I shall see that my mind is bent on rash judging.

Even in the most petty things. Someone has a pretty complexion: it can't be 'her own.' Another has beautiful hair: the colour comes out of a bottle, of course. I will not give people credit for the good they do possess; but if, on the other hand, I do not get my due – what injustice!

This habit of constantly ill-judging my neighbours is very injurious to my character. How can there be true love of God in my heart when it is full of derogatory, sneering thoughts of His creatures?

Love is what the world is crying for today – generous, selfless, forbearing love.

When I reflect that the first Christians were singled out by their love for each other, how ashamed I am! What must non-Christians think of us? What do non-Catholics think of our want of charity towards one another?

We are cradled in the same Faith, nourished with the same Sacraments, embraced in the love of our one Father. How do we show the bond we have in the common Fatherhood of God? How do we make ourselves distinguished as children of the Truth?

It is not for me to probe into the motives of others. I have quite enough to do to examine my own conscience without scrutinising those of others. How can I tell the secret intention of that soul about whom I know so little? How can I pronounce upon the motive that prompted another to act in such a manner? It is not for me to judge, no matter how black the case looks.

The rash judgements I impetuously leap to are nearly always wrong, and I have never yet learnt that one cannot judge a book by its cover.

'Judge not, and you shall not be judged.' says Our Lord; and daily I judge unkindly. Often I have no grounds at all for the opinions I profess – often the wish is father to the thought. I want to think badly of others, I want to catch them tripping, I want to feel that they are no better than myself. The evil in me wants to make mischief, and make mischief it does.

For do I keep my rash judgements to myself? Very seldom. Whether true or false, they must be triumphantly noised abroad, so that I may get the credit of having 'found out' some hapless individual.

This cruel Rash Judgement leads to Detraction and Calumny, and I have to examine my conscience seriously upon the harm I may have done.

The law of the land presumes a person to be innocent until proved guilty. Even the ordinary civil law will not condemn unheard.

But I will rather condemn first: I will pre-suppose guilt till innocence is proved. Most often, I do not trouble to find out the right of the case.

And I am a Catholic, decently brought up, taught to tell the truth, educated in my Faith, familiar with the Commandments; quite aware that, besides Heaven, there is Purgatory and there is Hell.

At the very least, I must keep an open mind before I judge; but surely, I will not be content with that? I will try to make my judgment wide and generous – giving credit where it is due, and giving it 'pressed down and running over.' I will be so much happier if I think well of others. There is a boomerang in rash judgement, which rebounds upon the judge and sours the mutual intercourse of God's creatures. Expect the best and find best; there is good in the worst of us.

7. Scandal.

I think very lightly about 'giving scandal.' If I shock people, I take it for granted they are straitlaced prigs. It doesn't enter my head to think that I am at fault.

Even if I do not give scandal by grave sin, there are a hundred ways in which I can harm my neighbour's character. I cannot forget that dreadful sentence spoken by Our Lord: 'Woe to the man by whom they (scandals) come. It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and he were cast into the sea.' Those words from our merciful Saviour.

Apart from the scandal I give by my actual sins, it is necessary for me to take care not to offend the prejudices of my neighbours. It is uncharitable of me to jibe at their religion, their politics or their nationality. It is very wrong to hurt their susceptibilities even in ways which to me are perfectly justified, but which in their eyes are not so. 'One man's meat is another man's poison.' Everyone has a personal standpoint and individual ideals. I may put my Faith into disrepute by carelessly doing things quite lawful to me, which yet may be against the possibly narrow opinion of non-Catholics. I might even thus discourage some groping soul from finding its way to the Truth.

But alas! I seem to enjoy shocking people; it amuses me to see the pursed lips, the lowered eye. It makes me laugh to hear them utter that time-worn phrase: 'It wasn't so in my time.' To say the least, it isn't kind to tread on other people's toes; there is a great want of charity in deliberately hurting the principles of others.

How often do I give scandal by my sins, making light of what I know to be wrong, perhaps to a weaker companion – glossing it over: 'It is only this once.'... 'No one will ever know.' Et cetera. What scandal I can give to those frailer souls who perhaps look to me for a lead! What scandal I can give by repeating an unkind or an unbecoming story! How can I tell the effect my idle deeds and words may have on the minds of others?

Have I ever made an insinuation to another, perhaps robbing him of his peace of mind and involving him in the horrors of scruples? I do not know. I shall never know what the effect of my bad example has been until I stand before the Throne of God to render an account of my works.

Then shall I not be appalled to see the scandal I have given?

What excuse can I make? I have none. I have carried tales from one to another; I have talked about the sins of my neighbours, perhaps revealing some hidden fault; I have nursed falsehood until I have made myself believe it, and passed it on as authentic information; I have made wild guesses as to the motives of those I do not like: I have run down their successes, and belittled their virtues.

And Our Lord has told us – nay, commanded us – to love our neighbour as ourselves.

Oh, I am ashamed of the harm my spiteful tongue has done. I am horrified of the use I have made of that precious gift of Speech, which was bestowed upon me in order that I might hold converse with my fellowmen. Above all, I sink to my knees in humiliation when I think that He, the All-Merciful, my Saviour and my Judge, rests so often upon this wicked tongue of mine.

My Jesus, whenever the Sacred Host touches my tongue in future, let me remember to breathe a prayer that I may keep my speech kindly, pure and gentle. Teach me to judge as I would be judged; to be forbearing and tolerant. In short, teach me to love my neighbour as myself.

FORGIVENESS.

1. Memory.

Memory is one of the three powers of my soul; and it is, surely, a very gracious Gift of God.

By it, I let my thoughts travel back to my childhood, to my earthly recollections of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters and I know how happy we children were – so safe and so loved. My school-days, too, were full of pleasant incident. I had good fun with my companions. I like to call to mind the images of those who taught me – the head mistress of whom I stood in such awe, the other teachers who came and went, the priests who visited our school to give us instruction now and then.

I dwell upon the holidays when I joined the family circle, and perhaps we went away somewhere together. I remember when I was ill, at different times, how good people were – what a spoiling I got.

Birthdays and Christmases were occasions of rejoicing; there were secret preparations beforehand, which thrilled me, and glorious surprises when the happy days dawned.

Of course, I remember some sadness, too – ‘disappointments’, ‘failure to pass some exam’, and other unhappiness. But they are over, and, if I muse upon them regretfully, the sting has gone out of the pain long ago.

I recollect dear friends and relations who have been taken from me by death. I miss their loved presence, and, as I breathe a prayer for the happy repose of their souls. I thank God, too, that He let them touch my life and cheer it with their kindness and affection.

As I grow older in life, and the years lengthen behind me as shadows extend in the western sun, my memories, too, stretch further into the past and crowd my mind with their bitter sweet recollections.

Some beautiful things have marked my path – affection, loyalty, devotion. My intellect, also, has entrancing memories for me. Through it, I call to mind strains of exquisite music, which I have

heard, plays, films and books, which have lingered in my mind. Perhaps I have been one of the lucky ones who have gone abroad: I can travel my journeys over again in memory, recalling the places I have seen, the wonders displayed therein. I seem to hear once more the bewildering chatter of a foreign tongue; I seem to taste again the strangeness of the foreign food.

Or perhaps I have been a sportsman, and I have pleasant recollections of the games I have played, the tournaments I have entered, the glorious free sensation of swimming in the open sea, the joy of riding or motoring.

On the whole, I have much happiness and many things of interest to remember.

Above all, I meditate upon the countless graces I have received, the immense privileges, which have been mine. I think of my First Communion, the blissful rapture of that wonderful day.

What can be more beautiful than this use of my gift of Memory? I met a man once who had lost his memory; he was but half a man. Although he appeared to be happy enough in the present, one could sense the strain in his manner, the mute groping for something he could not find. I have never forgotten him.

Yet it might, perhaps, be better for some of us if we, too, lost our memory.

For how is memory used? Too often, to remember wrongs, to nourish resentment, to brood upon injustice – fancied or real.

Am I not too ready to remember the unkindness I have received, the occasions upon which I have been unfairly treated? Oh, my memory is long – long when I think of the ill I have met with; but how sadly short when I consider God's mercies.

Nor am I content with remembering injuries of yesterday and last week. My mind goes back – back to my early years to recall past ills. More, I will not confine myself to my own, but must take up the cause of my family, my friends, my acquaintances and my country.

I will recall with resentment the wrongs of my ancestors. I will dwell on them and ponder over them till I distort them with exaggeration. I will live in the bad old days of the past; I will revel in their prevailing injustice. I will brood bitterly upon the days of persecution, until it almost seems as if I grudged the very Saints their martyrs' crowns. On the contrary, I should thank God upon my knees that their rich blood has bathed the soil of my native land. They hugged their chains; they embraced their wrongs, and they died, thanking their murderers.

I, too, will hug my chains. I will embrace my wrongs, because I know that I can turn them into precious jewels of merit to offer to my loving Saviour.

What is past is past, and cannot be undone. But if I do dwell upon the sufferings I have endured and the injuries I have received, let Memory sweeten and soften their recollection; and let me breathe a prayer for those who have given me cause to merit through suffering.

2. Apologizing.

'I beg your pardon' is a phrase not often heard today. At best, one hears: 'Pardon', or the more nonchalant: 'Sorry', with no sorrow at all in the tone of voice.

It may seem very trivial to think about this; but the old-fashioned quality of Politeness has its roots in the ancient Christian Virtues of Courtesy, Chivalry, Consideration for others.

The habit of mind, which prompts the quick apology, is guided by a principle of kindness; and the possessor of this will not easily bear rancour.

I have offended – probably unconsciously – in a very trivial way or erred through accidental clumsiness; and the right instinct for me is to make swift amends.

What does ‘I beg your pardon’ really mean? I am wrong. I stepped on your foot. I stood in your way. I took your place. I interrupted you. I did or said something, which vexed you. I didn’t mean to. I never thought. I am sorry; please give me your forgiveness.

That is really what I mean when I apologize; my instinct being to right quickly what I have done amiss. Very trivial, I say; hardly worth considering. So let us look at the other side.

I know people who never beg pardon; they push through queues, they stamp on my feet, they go in to Confession out of their turn, and they never apologize for their discourtesies. How annoying they are. How they put my back up and irritate me so that I can scarcely be civil to them. It is their own fault if I am ill-disposed towards them.

I know others who boast that they will never admit being in the wrong – it would be far beneath their dignity to say they were sorry for anything they had done. ‘I may be wrong.’ I heard one of these say once, ‘but I will never apologize.’

Do I find it hard to own up? Am I one of those who, for the life of me, can’t get out that word that sticks in my throat – that word to ask pardon when I have blundered? Do I feel it against my dignity to acknowledge that I am not always right?

A quick apology, as a rule, brings quick forgiveness; then all is well.

How often have I said, or heard ‘If only she had said she was wrong, I wouldn’t have minded’ – but now – ‘What happens now?’ Misunderstandings, offence, injustice – possibly leading to revenge.

And all for the lack of a little common politeness.

3. Taking Offence.

There is a certain unhappy class of person always ready to be offended, expectant of slights, snubs and contradictions. I say, advisedly, ‘unhappy’ because I know that people who are always watching for unpleasantness cannot be happy.

In our modern slang, we call them ‘huffy’ and ‘touchy’. Not a word can I say to them but they must take it up and twist it to some meaning disadvantageous to themselves.

They were the children at school who could never endure to be teased, who never saw a joke if it was in the least against themselves; who resented the most innocent chaff, who sulked and brooded over trifles and turned the lightest retort into an insult.

I had no use for that kind of schoolmate; I left her alone. If one wants trouble, one is sure to find it.

There is a false humility in this attitude, too. ‘Of course, no one listens to what I say.’ ‘I am not good enough for them.’ ... et cetera. The speaker doesn’t really believe what she is saying.

The world has no time to waste on those who are forever misinterpreting the remarks and deeds of others. One simply doesn’t bother to embark upon explanations, which will only be misconstrued.

Do I take offence? Am I ready to misinterpret the words of others, and do I jump to the conclusion that, if two of my friends are talking together, they must be disparaging me? Do I resent, chaff, and deliberately misunderstand the motives of my fellows? Do I fall into long, brooding silences, and turn a deaf ear to amends that may be offered to me? In short, am I 'huffy' and 'touchy' myself?

If so, I am proud, unjust, selfish and uncharitable – and many other things. I nurse a dull feeling of resentment, out of which grows a sensation of dislike and antipathy to others and, growing, assumes a magnitude out of all proportion to the initial offence.

In my sullen mind, I often credit my neighbours with motives unknown to them; but nothing will convince my determined obstinacy, nothing will persuade me to soften and to forgive.

I think of myself – and of myself only – of how badly I have been treated, of how unhappy I am. And I am unhappy – how could I be otherwise with this poison spreading over my soul?

Honestly, how often is taking offence justified? Isn't it nearly always due to some misunderstanding? And if people do say or do anything uncharitable, don't I often beat them at their own game? Why should I resent a return of my own coin?

Why not shake it off, like water off a duck's back? Why not ignore the double meaning, pretend not to notice the insinuation, join in the joke against myself?

The unkind jibe falls harmlessly to the ground when the victim treats it with good humour; the smart 'take in' doesn't come off so pat when the dupe leads the laughter.

I will try to banish this petty resentment from my mind. I will try to correct this touchy, supersensitive attitude I have adopted. If I can learn to overlook generously these small annoyances, and refuse to see offence, whether it is intended or not, when the big trials of Life confront me, I shall be the better able to forgive largely, as forgive I must.

4. Fair Play.

Deeply implanted in the human heart is a sense of Justice; there are few who do not like to see Fair Play.

There is nothing I resent so much as the feeling that I have been 'done', that I have been passed over without due cause, that I have been suspected groundlessly and pronounced guilty without proof. To use a homely phrase: 'My blood simply boils.' I find it hard to forgive injustice to myself, the paltry lies told, the advantages taken. I despise the poor loser, who must win the game, and cheats a bit in order to do so. I have the greatest contempt for my adversary at the card table who peeps over my hand.

Incidents of childhood have rankled in my memory – some favouritism displayed, an unfair judgement, and unmerited punishment. These stick in my mind and bring a sense of dislike and animosity towards those who caused me to suffer thus.

Let me turn the picture round. Am I sure that I have always played fair? Have I been particular to right any injustice I may have caused? Have I been strictly impartial in my dealings with others? Have I been guilty of even mild deception or taken a mean advantage in a game? Have I sailed under false colours, letting it be thought that I am better than I really am? I am afraid I have not always played fair; and what I despise in others I must equally condemn in myself. I do resent injustice, I do grow indignant at anything, which is unfair; but I see that I, too, am guilty in this

respect. I will not forgive the injuries that I receive, but I pardon my own lapses. That is distinctly 'not fair'.

When the sense of wrong rankles within me, I will turn to that monstrous travesty of human justice – the Passion of Our Blessed Lord; and I will take one sense to consider now.

When Pilate ordered Christ to be scourged, I think he took the first definite step in his condemnation of innocent Blood. Up to then he had hesitated, he had tried to get out of actual judgement. He had not ill-treated his Prisoner. But this is what Saint Luke now tells us: "Pilate said: 'You have presented unto me this Man as one Who perverts the people; and behold, I, having examined Him before you, find no cause in this Man in those things wherein you accuse Him... I will chastise Him, therefore, and release Him'."

Does that not strike to the depths my sense of 'fair play'? What would I say of a schoolmaster who said: 'I don't believe this pupil of mine is guilty of what you accuse him. – I can't find the slightest proof that he is.'

'Anyhow, I will give him a good caning, and let him go.' Oh! What should I think of such a master? How furious I should be!

But yet because my Saviour has first trodden the path of pain and shown me that injustice must be borne and forgiven, I in my way must endure and forgive. He has taught me how to pardon my enemies, but I have strayed far, far from His teaching.

I sometimes think that the Scourging at the Pillar was the most unjust act of the Passion. I ponder Pilate's words: 'I find him innocent, therefore I will punish Him.'

My Jesus, teach me to endure wrongs patiently. Let me even welcome them, for I can turn them into such a wonderful source of merit if I will only bear them manfully and forgive them generously.

5. Revenge.

I like to get my own back: to give as good as I get. If someone does me an ill turn, I shall be sure to do one equally bad in return.

In short, I am an upholder of the tit-for-tat doctrine: ready to believe that because I am erred against, that gives me justification in hitting back. 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' is my motto' – I ought to have lived in the days of the Old Testament.

What does Our Lord say upon this subject? 'You have heard that it hath been said: An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you not to resist evil, but, if one strike you on the right cheek, turn to him also the other... You have heard that it has been said: You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say to you: Love your enemies; do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you... And as you would that men should do to you, do you also to them in like manner.'

Saint Paul says: "Revenge not yourselves, for it is written: 'Revenge is Mine, and I will repay,' says the Lord."

I am a Christian and a Catholic. I know quite well that it is not for me to pay back any evil I have received. God is the supreme Judge and Avenger of us all, and He says: 'Revenge is Mine.' I dare not steal from Him what He claims for Himself, no matter how much I feel justified in doing so, no matter how much satisfaction I fancy I will gain by taking revenge.

The satisfaction I think I will gain? – Don't I know from experience that, when I have taken revenge, my feeling is not one of triumph or satisfaction at all? On the contrary, I can't get away from the sensation that I have lowered myself, and I know that I have acted against my conscience. I feel neither happy nor content. I have not got the better of my adversary, because I have got the worst out of myself. We are not 'quits'. Two wrongs will never make a right; and no amount of ill-doing on the part of another will ever justify my taking the law into my own hands and seeking revenge.

Evil grows of itself and a great deal too rapidly; and I am doing all I can to propagate it when I take revenge; and sin vies with sin and spreads its poison all round.

It is, certainly, not easy to bear wrongs patiently. It requires a special grace of God for which I should earnestly pray. But to take revenge deliberately is cold-blooded and vicious; and I will never gain anything by it but an increase of hatred and ill-will and the darkening of my conscience, which brings misery to my soul.

And, besides, I should never forget that the person I seek vengeance upon, or criticize, may be very much closer to God than I am, and that eventually he may be higher in Heaven than I shall be, if I get there at all. Nay, at the very moment when I take my revenge, God may be looking upon him as on one of His special friends. Let me beware of injuring any friend of God, even the least, in thought, word or deed.

6. Family Feuds.

I have read books about the 'vendettas' of Corsica and Sicily, and very exciting these tales have been – feuds kept up from generation to generation, tribe against tribe, party seeking the downfall of party – until it seems as if the whole of the two islands must have been divided into two camps, hating each other bitterly and vowing mutual vengeance.

I didn't give much thought to the actual question of right and wrong in the excitement of the story. The plot was laid in a country far away from my own; and, in my ignorance, I possibly concluded that 'foreigners' are in a different category to my own countrymen, and that the Latin races are all hot-blooded, passionate and revengeful.

But do we ourselves live so harmoniously together in our own land?

Are we distinguished for our mutual charity? Are we friendly disposed to all our neighbours?

Even in my own limited circle of acquaintances I have known (and probably taken part in) many bitter quarrels – quarrels which are never forgotten, quarrels which have gone on, perhaps, for years and years, till their origin is obscured in the mist of the years. Possibly, I have taken sides, championing the cause of my friends, keeping up animosity, vilifying the other side with my tongue. I have delighted in cutting 'enemies' in the street, looking through them when we met. I have disliked their very presence near me.

If I have done this, I have assisted in keeping up enmity and I have gone directly against the teaching of my Saviour.

Some persons I know will not 'speak to each other'; they can't be invited to the same house together: they will not sit at the one table. And alas! That it should be so! Even in my small experience, I have known brothers and sisters at variance, sons and daughters of the same parents

who will not darken each other's doors, who, if they pass each other on the road, will do so without the slightest acknowledgement.

Two brothers will kneel side by side at the Altar rails and receive their one Lord and Master; and, with the Divine Presence still within them, will stare stonily at each other as they leave the Church.

Is this not truly deplorable? It seems incomprehensible that such people could ever be happy. Do they never feel the pull of the family tie? Can they repudiate their own flesh and blood? Is it possible that such an unnatural state of affairs can exist because of an offence committed years ago, and exaggerated since, out of all recognition? Can such persons repeat the words of the 'Our Father'? 'Forgive us our trespasses'? Et cetera?

The malice, which delights in keeping up ill-feeling, is magnified a hundred-fold when it is found in the Christian family. The tradition of spite and hatred handed down through generations is a terrible inheritance. Awful will be the responsibility of anyone who has fomented this evil and stirred up and encouraged wicked passions of enmity within the Christian family.

Let me go through my own list of acquaintances. Is there anyone whom I will not acknowledge, anyone to whom I owe a grudge, anyone whom I will go out of my way to avoid? Let me seek them out and give them at least a smile.

Do I quarrel with my own immediate family? Of course, I do. I have tiffs with my brothers and sisters. No doubt, I have often told them that I will never speak to them again. That is my human weakness. I have erred in this respect again and again. But oh! My God, let me be quick to 'makeup', swift to make friends again. Do not let the sun go down on my wrath. My family belongs to me in a very intimate way: I must not be at enmity with a single member of it. Make me see how wicked it is to keep up malice, to continue an old feud as if it were an honourable family tradition.

It does shock me when I know brothers and sisters who will not meet one another. But am I not paving the way for such a contingency in my own family when I keep up quarrels and bear ill-will?

Our Lord has said: 'If, therefore, you offer your gift at the altar and there you remember that your brother has anything against you: leave, therefore, your offering before the altar and go first to be reconciled to your brother, and, then coming, you shall offer your gift.'

So that I must even leave my prayers in order to make friends. For how can I pray if there is enmity in my heart?

7. Forgiveness.

'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us.'

I repeat that sentence several times a day; and it makes no impression upon me. I certainly can't take heed of what I am saying, or the grave meaning of the words would frighten me.

I have been thinking about Forgiveness in these pages. Perhaps it has been brought home to me a bit how I abuse my Memory by making it remember injuries; how, by my pride in denying a good-mannered apology I bring into being a sense of hurt indignation. I see that, when I take offence, I allow the most trivial and often innocent remark to rankle and fester in my mind, bringing feelings of dislike and un-charitableness with the wound. I become aware that I am one of those who, while justly resenting anything that 'Isn't Fair', yet nurse my resentment till it is exaggerated out of all proportion. I am conscious that I enjoy giving back as good as I get: that I often plan for a Revenge,

which, when it comes off, brings me no feeling but one of shame. I have trembled at the vindictiveness of the Family Feud; and, gathering all these points into one, I realize that, when I give way to such faults, I am making it harder and harder for myself to forgive.

And forgive I must – wholeheartedly and sincerely.

I heard someone, who should have known a great deal better, say once: ‘I will forgive, but I will never forget.’

That sentence shocked me. I know that Forgiveness is incomplete without forgetfulness.

When I read in the Gospel about our Lord’s dealings with sinners, I am struck at once by His wonderful kindness and by the quick pardon He gives to the sinner: ‘Go, and sin no more’. ‘Your sins are forgiven you, go in peace.’ ... Above all: ‘This day you shall be with Me in Paradise.’ There is no allusion to what has gone before: no bringing up of the past. He gives complete forgiveness for true repentance, and, with forgiveness, forgetfulness. He seems to have ignored the evil life the Penitent Thief had led at his first stammering word of sorrow. Why cannot I cast into oblivion all memory of the small ills I have had to endure at the hands of others?

I must do so if I am to be forgiven.

It is a dreadful thing to say to my Maker: ‘Forgive me, as I forgive my neighbour.’ If I insist upon harbouring malice and fomenting family quarrels, well ... God will take me at my word some day: and if I shall be forgiven only as I have forgiven, how pitiable my lot! Let me realize this fully before I say the ‘Our Father’ again.

I shall not be allowed to live a second life: there is no second trial. I don’t know when I am going to die; and, if God calls me and I go to Him with rancour and vindictiveness in my heart, how can I expect His mercy?

Oh, my Jesus, give me that Peace which the world cannot give, Peace with myself, Peace with my neighbour. Peace with You. Do not let me be a mischief-maker, a promoter of discord, a revengeful, remorseless member of the human race. Teach me to spread Your Peace in my own little way – through my neighbourhood, through my acquaintanceship – and, above all, through my own family. May I forgive readily and generously whatever ill is done to me – even thanking You for permitting the pain to come my way, so that, through it, I may be purified. Give me opportunity to reconcile those at variance and to show by my example how gladsome a thing it is to forgive and to forget.

So that, when I kneel down to say the prayer, which You Yourself taught us, let me say these words with a clear conscience:

‘Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us.’ The world is sad enough, dear Jesus; let us not add to its sadness.

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