

You may have heard the saying, “I do not get mad, I get even.” This is nothing more than a restatement of the childish excuse, “He hit me first!” Human nature never seems to outgrow the desire to do to others what they have done to you. And we know how easily this escalates as we give “tit for tat.” Our feelings get hurt and then we bear a grudge against the offender. The old idea of “an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth” flows out of this desire to repay evil with evil as a form of justice. But this is not the attitude which Jesus asks of His children. We know about Jesus’ instruction to turn the other cheek when someone wrongs us. We are also taught to pray in the Lord’s Prayer, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” In the Word of God which is before us this morning, we have an example of how this was done by Joseph after his father, Jacob, passed away. We are to take to heart the encouragement, FORGIVE THE SINS COMMITTED AGAINST YOU. 1) Wrongs are going to happen in this life, but 2) We are not to bear a grudge.

Maybe a little background history is in order. When Jacob wanted to marry Rachel, he was deceived into marrying her sister, Leah, first. Jacob always favored Rachel and her children. This became obvious as he treated Joseph differently from the sons born to his other wives. Joseph did not do himself any favors as he seemed to flaunt his position. The brothers’ hatred for Joseph grew so deep that one day they decided that they would kill him to get rid of him. Reuben, the oldest, talked them out of that, hoping to rescue Joseph from their hands. But when some Midianite traders came along, the other brothers sold Joseph into slavery, and he was taken down to Egypt.

Then, as a slave, Joseph was falsely accused and ended up being thrown into prison. While in prison, he helped one of Pharaoh’s servants, who promptly forgot about him for several years. When God used Joseph to interpret Pharaoh’s dreams, and Joseph advised Pharaoh to prepare for the coming famine. Pharaoh made Joseph second in command in Egypt to do this preparation. When Jacob sent Joseph’s brothers to Egypt to get food, they did not recognize Joseph, though Joseph recognized them. After testing them to see if they had changed at all, Joseph revealed himself to his brothers and brought his whole family to Egypt to spare them from the effects of the famine.

Humanly speaking, Joseph had every reason to bear a grudge against his brothers. Their actions against him caused him all sorts of unjust suffering, first as a slave, then as a prisoner. Their actions against him were intentional — they had not happened by accident. Joseph himself reminded them: **“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”** (20) Even through all of the evil intentions to hurt Joseph, God was able to change its purpose into something good for many people — the saving of many lives.

As we live in this world, there are going to be many times when others are going to sin against us. Many of those times, it could well be done unintentionally with no evil intent to hurt us. But there are also going to be times when others sin against us intentionally as they desire some harm to come our way. While we might be able to overlook those things which were done unintentionally, we probably find it much more difficult to forgive those things which others have done purposely to harm us.

What we need to remember is what we do to God each and every day. There are a multitude of times each day that we sin against God unintentionally — times when we sin against Him and we are totally unaware that we have even done it. In addition to those times, we also sin against Him intentionally, knowing full well what He considers to be right and wrong, and defiantly doing what we want anyway. How often do we not thumb our noses at God, making excuses for doing the things we know that He hates!

But what does God do when we sin against Him? Certainly He does not hold a grudge against us, nor does He seek to get even with us. What God does for us is to forgive those sins, removing them from us as far as the east is from the west, never remembering them or bringing them up again. This is also what He desires us to do when someone sins against us. We are to do what Jacob encouraged Joseph to do: **“I**

**ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.’ Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father.” (17)**

This is what Joseph did as he brought his family to Egypt to take care of them during the famine. He supplied them with all that they needed, and gave them choice land on which to settle in Egypt, where they would end up living for centuries before they were taken back to the promised land. He had had every opportunity to punish his brothers or get even with them when they came to get food the first times. He could have kept them in prison, and maybe even have had them executed since he was the second in command in all the land of Egypt.

Even though he had the ability, as well as the opportunity, he treated his brothers as God wants us to treat all men — love them as God does. Joseph had forgiven them for all that they had done to him.

But now there was a change. Jacob had just passed away. The guilty consciences of the brothers again began to bother them, thinking that Joseph had just been biding his time so as not to hurt his father. Now that Jacob had died, they thought he might freely bring acts of vengeance upon them. Apparently the same thought had crossed Jacob’s mind since He had the brothers bring a message for Joseph, encouraging him to forgive them for their sins against him.

But Joseph had not carried a grudge through all of these years. He had forgiven them from the heart, just as Jesus asks us to do. The brothers did not have anything to worry about.

This is the way that Jesus forgives us, and the way that He desires that we forgive each other. In the Lord’s Prayer, when we ask the Father to forgive us for all of our sins, we are also asking Him to help us to forgive others just as we have been forgiven. That means that we will forgive fully and completely, never bringing up those sins that we have forgiven.

Just as we fall into the same sins day after day, we always receive complete forgiveness from the Father. In our gospel lesson today, Peter asked Jesus how many times he had to forgive his brother when he sins against him. In His answer, Jesus shows us the depth of His love in forgiving us, for He asks us to forgive time and again, without keeping count. Jesus wants us to do the same to our fellow man — as often as they sin against us, we are to forgive them from the heart.

We are to forgive and not to bear a grudge. Forgiving from the heart will even benefit ourselves, for we will not let that sin against us eat away at us. We can be at rest, knowing that all things are in God’s hands — He will take care of it as He sees fit.

So let us not feel that we have to get even when someone sins against us. That is the sinful nature within us rearing its ugly head. What Jesus wants us to do is to forgive the sins committed against us, just as Jesus forgives all of the sins which we commit against Him. Only as we allow His love to fill out hearts will we be able to do this.