

From the Pastor



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Our Catholic faith teaches us to be forgiving. We all experience that forgiveness is sometimes easy but also difficult in some cases. We remember a great example of Pope St. John Paul II who after surviving the assassination actually went to see his attacker to talk to him and offer him forgiveness.

Here is just another story about Jo Nodding, victim of a violent attack and rape in 2004. Her attacker denied his guilt and forced a trial, which only added pain and suffering to her and her family. At one point in the trial, the judge said to the attacker: "You have destroyed this woman's life." That didn't sit well with Jo; she didn't want it to be that way. During the process, she was visited by a victim liaison officer who mentioned the possibility of "restorative justice" - of Jo actually going to the prison to meet with her attacker. The idea stayed with her, and four years later, after plenty of preparation, the man agreed to a meeting. They met in the prison, and Jo explained to the young man how his crime had affected her. He was brought to tears by what she said. She hadn't been expecting an apology, but he gave her one.

This is how she herself describes the end of their meeting: As the meeting was finishing I was asked if there was anything else I wanted to say, and I gave him what I've later come to think of as 'a gift'. I said to him "What I am about to say to you a lot of people would find hard to understand, but I forgive you for what you did to me. Hatred just eats you up and I want you to go on and have a successful life. If you haven't already forgiven yourself, then I hope in the future you will." I didn't say it to excuse what he did, or to minimize it, but because I wanted myself to be free of that burden of grievance, and as importantly for me, I hoped Darren could learn, move on, and forgive himself. This had a massive impact on Darren – I could see he was shaken by the parting 'gift' I had given him. As I was leaving I wished him good luck for the future... As I left that room I felt on top of the world. Meeting him gave me closure, because I had said everything I had wanted to say and I had taken back some kind of control over my life. I know it had an impact on him. I'm not a victim any more, I'm a survivor. I've been able to make sure something good has come out of something bad.

This is what forgiveness does, even just on a natural level: it makes sure that something good comes out of something bad, it sets our hearts free to love more like Christ loves, and that is the secret to the happiness that we all crave.

+ Father Roger