



"So then, putting away falsehood let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. Be angry but do not sin. Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:25-32).

Forgiving someone appears initially to be a concept easily understood. It's meaning is one of granting forgiveness or pardon for an offense. But what if the offense was a misunderstanding or something taken out of the context in which it was presented? What if it was a misrepresentation of facts? Does this make the unforgiving acceptable?

Whenever there is much depending on the offense it makes it the harder to forgive. Accompanying reactions often defuse among others and then others are led into a trap of being convinced the unreasonable is indeed reasonable. These are the beginnings of falsehood.

As the Lord Jesus Christ died in excruciating pain upon the Holy Cross, our Lord had much to resent. The envious and paranoid religious leaders and their

followers had stalked him at length, arrested our Lord upon a false and untrue charge and misrepresentation of facts, forced Him to undergo a trial of mockery and then sentenced the Lord Jesus Christ to death. Prior to this He was brutally beaten and forced to carry His own cross to the hill where His death would be finalized. Truly this was indeed horrible!

Nails through His hands and feet, His holy Body being attached to a unbearable wooden cross, and crying out in pain, He said "Father forgive them for they know not what they do!" The Lord Jesus Christ example is real and tells us that even if the offenses we encounter against us are untrue, (falsehoods, trials, and tribulations) we should always forgive those who hurt us.

Patiently endure all tribulations and falsehoods as they make you stronger. The Sayings of the Fathers especially address such issues as these:

"On one occasion certain brethren went to Abba Agathon, because they had heard that he took the greatest possible care that his mind should not be disturbed by anything, and they sought to try him, and to see if his mind would rise to any matter at all. And they said to him, "Art thou indeed Agathon? We have heard that thou are a whoremonger and a

boastful man." And Agathon said unto them, "Yea, I am." And again they said to him, "Agathon thou art a garrulous and talkative old man," and he said unto them "Indeed I am." And again they said unto him, "Agathon, thou art a heretic." And he said unto them, "I am not a heretic." Then they said unto him, "Tell us now why in answer to all these things which we have said to thee thou hast replied, "Yea" and that thou hast endured them all with exception of the accusation of being a heretic." Abba Agathon said unto them, "The earlier things I accounted as profitable to my soul, but heresy means separation from God, and I do not wish to be separated from God." And when the brethren heard these words they marveled at his sollicitude and went away rejoicing."

Another famous Sayings of the Fathers:

"On one occasion certain philosophers came to the desert to try the monks. And there was living a man who led a life of fair works, and they said unto him, "Come thither and his anger rose and he reviled them." Now there passed by a certain great monk who was a Libyan and they said unto him, "O thou monk who hast grown greyheaded in iniquity come thither." And he went to them readily, and they smote him on one cheek, whereupon he turned the other to them. And when they saw this they rose up

straightaway and came to him, and they said, "Verily, this is a monk." Then they set him in their midst, and asked him saying, "What things do ye who are living in the desert do more than we?" Ye fast and we also fast; ye led pure lives and we also led pure lives; whatsoever ye do we also do; what do you do in the desert more than we?" The Libyan said unto them, "We are keep watch over our minds." And the philosophers said unto him, "We are unable to keep watch over our minds."

The beloved Story of St. Marina the Virgin:

St. Marina the Virgin's mother died while she was a small baby. Her pious father retired to the monastery following her mothers' death and left St. Marina in the care of a relative. The father soon was remorseful of leaving his daughter and wanted to bring young Marina to the monastery to be with him. He represented his daughter as a son to the abbot, and thus obtained permission to bring Marina to the monastery. Dressed as a boy and with a new name "Marinus," St. Marina entered into the monastic way of life.

At 17 years of age St. Marina's father died. She continued in the monastery as the "beardless brother." Marinus (St. Marina) remained steadfast in performing all tasks requested of her without

complaint. Often these tasks took her to the harbor to purchase goods for the monastery requiring her to remain overnight at the inn. One day the innkeepers' daughter was found pregnant and accused "Marinus" (St. Marina) of fathering her child.

Marinus (St. Marina) suffered in silence the accusation and soon after the birth of the child was told she must care for the child. St. Marina was expelled from the monastery but following five years of patience and humiliation the abbot readmitted Marinus (St. Marina) and imposed upon her severe penance and the lowest of services.

Not too long after this, Marinus (St. Marina) died and when the brethren came to prepare her body for burial her true sex was discovered. The abbot was overcome with grief at the falsehood he had believed and the injustice he had unwittingly committed against St. Marina. The abbot had much admiration for the heroism of this saintly woman. This is a young woman who was falsely accused yet buried with the greatest respect and lamentation. The girl who had falsely accused St. Marina became possessed and was released only by confessing her sin and calling upon St. Marina for her intercession in Heaven.

The lessons here are that we should all remember to first and always be Children of God. We are asked to love one another, and within this love we are to not judge the other. If we choose to judge there are consequences to judgment, particularly a wrong one incurred from lack of understanding of messages given and situations of the happenings. It has been said that those who are pleased at finding faults are displeased at finding the good in a person. Consider this and know that judging another is the work only of the Lord.

We are told that in all things we are to be diligent.

"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23).

We are also taught to be patient:

"But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (James 1:4).

These are truly the greatest of teachers.

Bishop Youssef
Bishop, Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern
United States