

## The freedom of forgiveness



God, our neighbour and ourselves: if there is one thing of which we certainly all have need in our daily life, it is forgiveness. God's pardon, the pardon of our neighbour, and pardoning ourselves – It is a restorative, a reinvigorating honey. When forgiveness and the desire for it are genuine, great is the effect on the person who seeks and on the one who gives it. Asking for it is not easy. As Paul Auster writes, to ask pardon is “evidence of the fragile equilibrium between wrenching pride and tormenting regret” ( *The Brooklyn Follies* ). Nor is it easy prior to that, for it is even difficult to see that we need it.

Self-absolution: I know that I have behaved badly, but I had good reason for so doing, and it was not all my fault. This might be one of the more common temptations. We have lost the sense of confrontation, the capacity to see what we did wrong, to take responsibility for ourselves. Perpetually acquitting ourselves, holding fast to the superficialities of a mistake we made, we remain linger in infantilism. It is what is behind the bad act, however, that must be seen in truth and transformed.

But forgiveness also saves the one who forgives, not to succumb to the blows of pain and injustice. If hatred — understandable and awfully human — instantaneously becomes a soothing armour, nevertheless drop by drop it changes into a poison capable of consuming us, to drag away our humanity like an unrelenting torrent. Only forgiveness gives us back our freedom and, with freedom, our life.

Forgiveness owes much to Christianity. In Greek civilization, facing the torture of an executioner, vengeance was an interior obligation, and though it is true that an evolution had taken place (going beyond the law of retaliation, they moved from personal vengeance to that of the polis), the decisive step was nevertheless lacking still. Thus in the anguished decision of Euripides' Orestes, Agamemnon's second-born would not wish it, but he knows that his duty as the son is vengeance – and he does not shirk it.

But then, in a stable, another Son came to the world, answering the call of another nature all together.

It is pardon in its Christian variations, both old and new, to which we dedicate this supplement's issue. For, from pardon we are born; and by pardon we live.

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