



By Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers

# A Vehicle of Forgiveness

*Deacons are catalysts for healing, the hands and heart of God's mercy*

The evangelizing witness of the deacon serves as an icon of mercy in the life of the Church. The deacon, as a grace-filled sign of God's presence through a life of service, becomes the bridge for the Father's evangelizing mercy, connecting God's infinite, compassionate love to authentic healing in both the parish and families.

How does the deacon do this? By exercising generous and selfless responsibility for all human life. By working hard to balance family, work and ministry so that this inherent tension is never the cause of division, but promotes and fosters security and unity.

Most importantly, the deacon is a witness and example of how to live and act as a man of God, showing firsthand what it means to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and how that relationship is lived out daily.

Sadly, the Body of Christ can be closed to God's love because of hurt and resentment from the past. The deacon must recognize that those who have been hurt all too often remain bound and oppressed by negative emotions.

We cannot turn off our feelings or simply forget when someone hurts us deeply, but the heart that offers itself to the Holy Spirit turns injury into compassion and transforms that hurt into a prayer for those who harmed us.

The deacon must be the catalyst for healing by being the hands and heart of God's mercy, lovingly directing the suffering toward the merciful embrace of Christ. The Church asks God for forgiveness so that, with clean hearts and steadfast spirits, the faithful can be free to engage in the difficult task of forgiving others, which may be difficult but not impossible, for with God, "all things are possible" (Mt 19:26).

Forgiveness was so essential to the purpose and mission of Christ that when the apostles asked Jesus how to pray, he gave

them the Our Father, in which we ask God to "forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." This means, "Help me, Lord, to forgive others so that I may receive the forgiveness that you offer me."

Jesus knows the human heart, and when our hearts are angry and bitter when we harbor deep resentment, there is a part of us that is imprisoned by hate, a hate that can diminish or even block openness to forgiveness from others and God.

The evangelizing ministry of the deacon helps families to recognize the very strong and direct link between God forgiving us and us forgiving others.

Families cannot begin the process of healing until they face this Goliath in their lives. If they do not, the pain and resentment will remain in their hearts making familial relationships difficult or even impossible. The deacon, as a vehicle of the life-changing encounter with Jesus, helps family members to understand that to truly heal, two things must happen.

First, there must be unconditional forgiveness toward the person who hurt us.

Second, we must ask forgiveness from the person who hurt us for the feelings of hatred we felt toward them. In this way, through the ministry of the deacon, family members become conduits of God's merciful love by opening the graves of their hearts and rising to new life in Christ.

Working with and through the deacon, Jesus will let the fire of his merciful love burn away everything that turns family members' hearts away from him and allow each member of the family to become a vehicle of mercy to others. **TD**

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