

In today's gospel reading, Jesus tells us what forgiveness is: it's cancelling a debt. All his teaching about forgiveness is the same: to forgive is to cancel a debt. It has nothing to do with feeling. How can you feel warm towards someone who has hurt you? Or your family? Or has disappointed you or betrayed your friendship? Of course you can't feel warm towards them. But cancelling the debt they owe you isn't about what you feel – it's about what you will. Forgiveness is the ultimate act of love and, like love, it is always act of will.

An act of will requires strength. Gandhi once said: 'The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is for the strong.'

Yes, it can sometimes be hard to forgive and to let go, but we should remember harbouring resentment or a grudge can damage ourselves. To forgive means to let go of that resentment, to give it up for our own sake, not for the one who hurt us.

Pope John-Paul II said: 'Forgiveness is a personal choice, a decision of the heart to go against the natural instinct to repay evil.' It's never easy, no, but it's absolutely necessary for our own wellbeing and peace of mind. 'Forgive and forget' doesn't make much sense, because we can't consciously forget anything that's happened to us. We can't *unknow* something, we can't make it not have been. But we *can* cancel the debt – even the worst debt, as an act of will, a personal choice – just as the Lord did when he was being nailed to the cross. If we can look up at God and say: 'I cancel the

debt. I ask you not to hold this against them' – then however terrible we may *feel*, we *are* forgiving. Of course, the hardest person to forgive is ourselves – but thank God we can leave that to him. When God forgives it is always our failure to love – not some law or rule or regulation. From the left hemisphere, patriarchal, head-based perspective, the greatest sin is disobedience. For the right hemisphere, intuitive, heart-based perspective, the greatest sin is not to love. Rules and regulations have their place, of course – but they must be servants of love or they become tyrannical masters.