

Jesus asks us to forgive others from our hearts. How far are you willing to go? Marc Berkowitz was just a boy of 12 when he, his mother and twin sister were taken to a World War II death camp headed by Joseph Mengele. The Nazi's had used his brother and father for target practice before herding the rest of the family onto cattle cars and taking them to Auschwitz.

Minutes before his mother was taken to the gas chamber, she told her son, "to love God, to love humanity, and be a good boy. But should you be bitter and seek vengeance, I will ask God to send you to me." Before the death of his mother, he already had plenty to be bitter about.

Marc was singled out by Mengele for cruel and inhuman experiments which included "injections, pain, and the gas chamber." Scarred for life "he wears a brace on his back and must take medicine to combat brain damage."<sup>i</sup>

A couple of days after the death of his mother, Mengele asked the young boy, if he still believed in God. His mother's final words had an amazing impact. Marc knew that if he were to hate it would be his undoing. Instead, he told Mengele, "Everything has been taken from me now. But God you will never take because he instilled the feeling of love within me, and only he can take it away."

Decades later, Marc speculated how he would repay Mengele if he had the chance. "I don't want to see him suffer. Justice to me would be for him to spend time with me. I will be his servant again, very courteous. At the end of two years with me, he will say, 'Yes, we can teach our children not to hate.'" Marc had no doubts he could redeem this evil man, by turning the other cheek and loving his enemy.

Jesus asks us to forgive others from our hearts. How far are you willing to go? Bud Welch spent two days after the Oklahoma City bombing waiting to hear that his daughter was all right. The phone call never came. His daughter Julie-Marie was one of the 168 victims who died in the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building on April 19, 1995.

Once her death was confirmed, anger and rage set in. Bud Welch wanted blood. No trial was necessary. He says, "I suffered from a temporary insanity. I would have killed them with my bare hands if I could have reached them. Then, the realization hit me that trials were necessary. We didn't know beyond a doubt that McVeigh and Nichols were truly guilty." As the desire for revenge dissipated, Bud began to ask himself what will their executions do for me? "Vengeance solves no problems. The criminal commits a violent act. Then we, as a society, ratchet it up; we do him violence. Next, we ask ourselves, 'Why are we such a violent society?'"<sup>ii</sup>

Bud found it hard to forgive the men responsible for his daughter's death. But he did not feel it was right to execute them. He traveled around the country speaking out against the death penalty. Then in December 1998, after Timothy McVeigh had been sentenced to death, Bud traveled to Buffalo to meet McVeigh's father, Bill, and his sister, Jennifer. After the two hour encounter, Bud left the house crying but with a tremendous weight lifted from his shoulders. Bud explains, "I had found someone who was a bigger victim of the Oklahoma bombing than I was, because while I can speak in front of thousands of people and say wonderful things about Julie, if Bill McVeigh meets a stranger he probably doesn't even say he had a son."<sup>iii</sup> It took 5 years after his daughter's death before Bud Welch was finally able to forgive Timothy McVeigh in his heart. It was hard work, but it was a release that brought peace.

Jesus asks us to forgive others from our hearts. How far are you willing to go? We live in a very divided society. Executing a killer does not heal, nor does it move us forward. Rioting expresses rage, but it is so self-destructive. Responding to hatred with love is the path that leads us forward.<sup>iv</sup> When was the last time you forgave a brother for an injustice? When was the last time you let go of a grudge? Without God's help, somethings are nearly impossible.

Holy Father, God of infinite mercy, have pity for so many injustices that stain the conscience of mankind. Infuse in the heart of everyone the powerful breath of your Holy Spirit. Give us the spirit of courage to forgive others as you have forgiven us. Give us the spirit of peace to let go of hatred and anger. Give us the spirit of conversion to turn from the evil we cling to. Give us the spirit of trust to seek out your healing touch in the sacrament of reconciliation. Give us the spirit of peace that comes from loving others as you first loved us.

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<sup>i</sup> [mcall.com/news/mc-xpm-1985-12-03-2496152-story.html](http://mcall.com/news/mc-xpm-1985-12-03-2496152-story.html)

<sup>ii</sup> [franciscanmedia.org/oklahoma-city-bombing-two-fathers-and-forgiveness/](http://franciscanmedia.org/oklahoma-city-bombing-two-fathers-and-forgiveness/)

<sup>iii</sup> [theforgivenessproject.com/stories/bud-welch-usa/](http://theforgivenessproject.com/stories/bud-welch-usa/)

<sup>iv</sup> [publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/religion/article/82514-finding-grace-in-the-rubble-25-years-after-the-oklahoma-city-bombing.html](http://publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/religion/article/82514-finding-grace-in-the-rubble-25-years-after-the-oklahoma-city-bombing.html)