

“Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father” (Mt 5:44). How is this possible? We turn to Jesus for help. His passion and death are acts of love to bring us life. “He bared his back to the scourges; he submitted that head ... to the sharpness of the thorns; he gave himself up to be mocked and reviled, and at the end endured the cross, the nails, the lance, the gall, the vinegar, remaining always gentle, meek and full of peace.”ⁱ Because of his suffering and anguish, because of his sacrificial love we shall see the light (Isa 53rd:11).

“Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father” (Mt 5:44). How is this possible? We look to the saints for an example. The first nation to embrace a Christian identity was Armenia in the year 301. This came about through a holy man who was able to turn the other cheek and to love his enemy.ⁱⁱ

King Tiridates III had St. Gregory the Illuminator placed in a pit for the better part of 13 years. A man in prison can grow bitter from unjust imprisonment or he can grow in holiness by uniting his suffering with the crucified Christ. Gregory drew strength from the example of Jesus who prayed from the cross, “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do” (Lk 23:34).

When political betrayal by the Roman Emperor left the King of Armenia in a rage, he lost his sanity. Gregory was summoned from the pit to tend to the king. With a Christ like love for his enemy, Gregory invoked God’s help for a miracle. “The Advocate, the holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name—he will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid” (Jn 14:26-27). Peace of mind came to the king and he was restored to full health of mind and body.

A grateful king extended great freedom and power upon Saint Gregory the Illuminator. “Gregory baptized Tiridates III along with members of the royal court and upper class as Christians. Tiridates III issued a decree by which he granted Gregory full rights to begin carrying out the conversion of the entire nation to the Christian faith.”ⁱⁱⁱ

“Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father” (Mt 5:44). Our relationships with family and friends can sometimes turn sour. Hurt by others, we can turn bitter and a love that is not able to forgive can turn to distrust, fear, and hatred. We need look no farther than the Garden of Eden to see how the devil can deceive a husband and wife and drive them away from God.

Sin can grow and fester and pull any of us apart. Indeed, the devil wants to make our loved ones our enemies. Jesus calls us to love, to forgive, to start anew. In our weakness, we may want to hold onto a hurt ... but this can be very toxic. We must turn to God for the strength to forgive and to allow for miracles in our own lives. All things are possible with the help of God (Lk 1:37).

ⁱ From the Mirror of Love by Saint Aelred, abbot (Lib 3, 5: PL 195, 382)

ⁱⁱ catholicworldreport.com/2015/02/26/st-gregory-of-narek-was-the-new-doctor-of-the-church-a-catholic/

ⁱⁱⁱ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gregory_the_Illuminator