

“Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him? As many as seven times?” (Mt 18:21). I am sure Peter felt he was very generous in setting the limit of forgiveness at 7 times. Often in life, we can set the bar much lower. Three strikes and you’re out! Jesus sets the bar much higher. He calls us to forgive without limits.

There are tensions in every family, and often times in their teen years, a youthful person may test the resolve of their mother and father, or vice versa. Today is the memorial of Saint Frances of Rome. Frances was born in 1384 to a wealthy Roman family. The family definitely had plans for their daughter that did not fit with her own desires. Frances felt drawn to the religious life and wanted to live the consecrated life as a religious. The family, believing that marriage was more fitting for her, arranged a marriage for her. The custom of arranged marriages is foreign to our modern ears, but at that time it was an accepted practice that involved the wisdom of parents finding a suitable husband for their daughter.

Frances could have easily held a lifelong grudge against her parents. Instead with a spirit of forgiveness she entered into marriage and was soon surprised that she could be a faithful wife and still pursue her spiritual aspirations. As she became acquainted with her extended family, she learned that a sister of her brother-in-law had the same desire to live a life for God as she did. “So, the two, Frances and Vannoza, set out together—with their husbands’ blessings—to help the poor.”<sup>i</sup>

Together, the two women devoted themselves to corporal works of mercy. Frances bore three children one of whom died when a plague swept through Rome. The death of one child spurred her all the more to care for the less fortunate. “Frances gave up all her wealth to the sick and poor and began to go door to door raising money to aid the sick and poor. After the plague also claimed Frances’ daughter, she opened up a wing of her home as a hospital for the poor.”<sup>ii</sup>

This charitable way of life was lifegiving for Frances. The more she gave of herself the more she received. Frances wanted to encourage others to embrace her love of charitable work since the needs were so great, much more than she could do alone or with the help of Vanozza. Living in Rome, Frances sought permission from the pope to form a group of women dedicated to this charitable work. Following the ideals and spiritual disciplines of the Benedictine order but not being bound by the traditional vows of religious life, the group of oblates lived out the corporal works of mercy to feed the hungry and care for the sick.<sup>iii</sup> After her husband’s death 7 years later, Frances lived the remainder of her life in a monastery where she could more fully participate in the spiritual life under the Rule of Saint Benedict.

Frances died at the age of 56. She lived a full and generous life. Her relationship with God, her ability to forgive, and her heart for the poor helped her to be a model wife, mother, and Christian. “God favored her with the visible presence of her guardian angel with whom she conversed familiarly.”<sup>iv</sup> She is the patron saint of widows and motorists.

“Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus encourages us to forgive without limit. With God’s help, all things are possible. Frances learned the more that we give, the more we receive. This also works with forgiveness. The more we learn to forgive, the more generous our hearts become in reaching out to others with the forgiveness the Lord first showed to us.

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<sup>i</sup> [franciscanmedia.org/saint-of-the-day/saint-frances-of-rome](http://franciscanmedia.org/saint-of-the-day/saint-frances-of-rome)

<sup>ii</sup> [catholicnewsagency.com/saint/st-frances-of-rome-415](http://catholicnewsagency.com/saint/st-frances-of-rome-415)

<sup>iii</sup> [franciscanmedia.org/franciscan-spirit-blog/lent-with-the-saints-frances-of-rome](http://franciscanmedia.org/franciscan-spirit-blog/lent-with-the-saints-frances-of-rome)

<sup>iv</sup> *Ibrevairy*