

Bound to Forgive

Lawrence Martin (Marty) Jenco, OSM (1934-1996), who was a member of the Order of Friar Servants of Mary, was held hostage in Beirut, Lebanon, for nineteen months beginning in 1985. The following is an excerpt from his book Bound to Forgive. Marty's experience of the freedom and peace that comes from unconditional forgiveness is a gift greatly needed in our world today.

Toward the end of my captivity one of my guards, a man named Sayeed who had at times brutalized me, sat down on my mat with me. He had recently started calling me “Abouna,” an Arabic name meaning “dear father.” At first I was Jenco, then Lawrence, then Abouna, indicating by the choice of names and tone of voice that a change of heart was taking place. He asked me if I remembered the first six months of my captivity. I responded “Yes, Sayeed. I remember all the pain and suffering you caused me and my brothers.” Then he asked “Abouna, do you forgive me?”

These quietly spoken words overwhelmed me. As I sat blindfolded, unable to see the man who had been my enemy, I understood I was called to

forgive, to let go of revenge, retaliation, and vindictiveness.

And I was challenged to forgive him unconditionally. I could not forgive him on the condition that he change his behavior to conform to my wishes or values. I had no control over his response. I understood I was to say yes.

I said: “Sayeed, there were times I hated you. I was filled with anger and revenge for what you did to me and my brothers. But Jesus said on a mountain top that I was not to hate you. I was to love you. Sayeed, I need to ask God’s forgiveness and yours.”...

The scene between Sayeed and me depicted two prodigal sons coming together. Sayeed asked



Lawrence Martin Jenco
Friar Servant of Mary

for my forgiveness. I asked God and Sayeed to forgive me my anger and hate, my desire to punish and get revenge. This was a graced moment. Two men, alienated brothers, off in our own alien lands, eating the silage of bitterness and resentment, embraced. Two sons came home to their hearts, in which the spirit of peace and reconciliation lives. It was a transforming moment of mutual forgiveness and healing of hurts. The gift of the moment moved us from alienation to reconciliation, and from brokenness to wholeness before God.

When I offered Sayeed my forgiveness, I knew intuitively I had been set free and could go home. I had empowered myself with God’s word, “Be kind and tenderhearted to one another and forgive one another as I the God of both of you have forgiven you.”

