



## Life Repair: Forgiving Ourselves

Article 6, August 2021

“No matter how badly we have trashed ourselves... the ultimately realised pearl of great price remains untrashed and undiminished in any way for it is that in us that belongs completely to God.”  
(CAC reflection, 05/21 – from a Thomas Merton teaching.)

Forgiving ourselves may be the most challenging of all. The more years we have, the more “if-onlys” or “I-wish-I-hadn’ts” can sneak through the cracks of our memory, and not infrequently in the dead of night when sleep eludes us, disturbing our peace once more through endless re-hashing of past mistakes. Our hurtful actions, it is true, cannot be undone or smoothed over. We can, though, be self-accepting without approving our action.

“We need,” says John Philip Newell, “to reclaim large areas of peace in ourselves... The more peace there is in us, the more peace there will be in a troubled world” (*A New Harmony*, p.301). “You can forgive the outer world,” Richard Rohr writes, “only if and when you have forgiven your own inner world” (*Immortal Diamond*, p.48). It is as essential to reach out to ourselves in compassion as it is to do so for others. Personal and collective brokenness are inseparable. Entering into our own healing in this way, we participate in Jesus’ mission of universal healing and wholemaking.

Yesterday, in the throes of lockdown, I watched an episode of *Call the Midwife*. Overcome with remorse for the dire consequences of her rigidity, and mired in past failures, the rather unpleasant superior decided it was time to go back to where she came from. Her sisters in contrast, though not unhappy at her decision, were much more compassionate towards her than she could be towards herself. Refusing a ride to the station and any help at all, she was stopped at the door by the most senior, lovable and apparently increasingly muddled character of the series. Sister Monica Joan placed into the departing sister’s hand a most delicious looking iced bun with the words: “There is a vanity in excess penance.”

Worth a thought.

### **An exercise in consciousness**

Breathe in: *That was then.*

Breathe out: *This is now.*

Breathe in: *I am.*

Breathe out: *Peace.*

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