

Germans call it “Bruderkrieg” – civil war – and that’s the worst conflict of all. It’s no secret. This kind of fratricide goes back to the beginning. In the 1st book of the Bible (1st Moses: Genesis) we hear a lot of this brotherly warfare and family feud going on already. **Remember Kain asking cheekily:** Am I my brother’s keeper? No, I’m his butcher nevermind his bully. That dark story line just continues: **Ishmael bullying his baby brother Isaac**, terrifying him, intimidating him until he couldn’t take it anymore and Abraham has to dismiss him into the desert. **Joseph’s brothers throw him in the pit**, sell him into slavery, tell their father Jacob: A beast devoured your son. Here’s his cloak of not so many colours, dripping red! And so it goes on¹.

You Americans got your **War of Independence**, we South Africans our **“Boer War”** with traitors, turncoats, court martials, most desperate, cruel bloodshed - all amongst brothers.² Sometimes it seems to me as if those bitter battles are fought to this day in our families, in business and politics: Crimes of passion, indignation, hot love turning into bitter hatred like in a dirty divorce or frightful domestic violence.³

St. Peter asked: How often should we forgive? 7x? Let’s not bluff ourselves, forgiving once is difficult – never mind 7 times. Yet IX our Lord says: Not just 7x, but 77x Even a true bean counter may get confused on this way to 77. That’s 77 misdemeanors, offenses, injuries, sins, trespasses and deep hurts and we’re to answer by forgiving up to 77x. That’s really without counting and ongoing... Imagine that. I can’t recall anybody crossing me that often 1 yes, 2 of course even 5 or 10 times, but 20; 30x no 77 never in my long life! Not even 55x i.e once every year. Talk about: Heaping coals on the heads of our enemies ... and Overcoming evil with good. Not succumbing to darkness, but letting God’s light of love and life shine brightly! Forgive without counting, as you have been forgiven graciously, freely and abundantly!

Pushing our perceived rights, demanding our dues we might argue: We’re too poor (weak, hurt or traumatized) to give up that personal right. We’re just unable to forgive or let bygones be bygones. We’ve got our pride after all. If we don’t stand up for our own rights, we’ll be short-

¹ In Exodus (2nd Book of Moses) that Israelite taunts his kinsman Moses: Are you going to kill me like you did that Egyptian the other day.

² That showed the Africans that these so-called Christian Europeans weren’t so peace loving after all. Just like the world wars amongst Europeans broke down the image of a Christian occident (Christliches Abendland)

³ Kowtow to the top, kicking those below on the ladder... #me too & other unfair discrimination and exploitation.

changed. You have to be tough to get what you deserve. Better push back otherwise you'll be pushed over, pulled over the table and taken advantage of – look like a loser. Who can afford that?

We can't just turn the other cheek. No way! Can't go that extra mile. That's utopian. Where would we land up? Never mind handing over one of our very special winter coats. That's blue-eyed. And our little brother and sister better be prepared to pay for the small cup of water. Nothing is free now anymore, is it? Tough times call for tough measures. Better take care of ourselves. Who else would?

That's why **St. Peter admonishes IX**: That innocent suffering, crucifixion and dying is just not right. That's why he so willing to take up the sword, hit Malchus, that servant of Herod —chopping off his ear. That's why the **sons of thunder** (John and James) suggest to let fire and fury from heaven destroy that inhospitable Samaritan village. And the **priest and the Levite** go right past the one, fallen amongst the robbers – after all, what's he to me? I don't owe, him anything. He's nothing to me. Dead to me. Is it only for convenience sake, because they've got business to attend to or just don't care for him. It's not just these church bureaucrats. Even **St. Peter denies IX 3x**: I don't know him, don't want to be associated on him, turns his back on him and ducks away in darkness. Ashamed, proved wrong, alone with his betrayal and sin. All that's written for our benefit, that we don't think if we stand, we can't fall. Pointing fingers at him or her, forgetting those fingers pointing at us. Watch out, be prayerful and don't be caught off guard. If a righteous priest, a orderly Levite and even apostle St. Peter could trip up that badly, how much more we poor, miserable sinners?

It's far more crucial to remember God's blessings and gifts and graces, than our hurts and resentments, however righteous these indignations seem to be! See, how God has made you his own, has called you his very own child – beloved daughter and son! Redeemed you, forgiven you and changed you from being a foreign sojourner to a blessed family member in the holy Christian Church, close friend of IX, blood brothers! How many countless times has he already forgiven you your sins? At confession – private or during corporate sessions on Sundays, then also answering your daily prayer: **Forgive us our trespasses...**

Just think about, how exceedingly blessed we are through **God's wonderful creation**, preservation and restoration! Material, physical and spiritual wellbeing. Daily bread – good governance, peace and prosperity. Family and friends and all that without any merit or worthiness on my part i.e. I could not pay for it, couldn't afford it, was presented with it – freely and abundantly from the first day of my life! Of course the **greatest and special gift, which we consider especially during Lent is the wonderful work of salvation and justification our Lord IX accomplished, when we were still enemies** – not because we deserved it, nor because we paid for it, but rather freely, abundantly and by pure grace alone. As Luther teaches about our redemption: Not with gold or silver, but with the innocent blood of IX and his terrible suffering and shameful death on the cross. IX is the vicarious sacrifice for all our sins and trespasses, he the innocent Lamb of God, who carries all the sins of the world. I did not deserve it, merit it, wasn't worth it. Should have burnt in hell and would have if IX had not come and died for me and in my stead. I could not pay the ransom. I was not up to God's demands. I fell far short. Still, he has forgiven, redeemed, paid the price – all of it. I'm free and so are you. The debt has been paid by IX the redeemer and propitiation and saviour. We are free again to live as children of God in holy and righteous lives as is pleasing to him our Lord and saviour. This empowerment he grants us again and again in various forms and great abundance of his precious gospel – the true treasure of the church and us Christians. This work of IX – his vicarious justification and most gracious and blessed exchange, enables you to forgive also, empowers you to turn the other cheek, swallow the harsh retort and bless those that curse you! **Like Joseph**: You brothers wanted to hurt me, but God turned it all into good and blessings! You deserved retribution, but God grants forgiveness and restoration of family good and wholesomeness. **Like Peter**: Been forgiven 3x, he strengthens the brethren, he doesn't sulk and withdraw, but works together with St. Paul and all the rest of the apostolic crowd taking care of God's lambs, ewes and rams. Although he gets reprimanded rightly time and again. Forgiven sinner, empowered to forgive also those, who sin against him. **Like Stephen** being martyred prays like his Lord and God IX taught him on the cross: *Father forgive them, for they know not, what they are doing.* **Like us too and we too do every day**, when we pray: *Our Father, who art in heaven ... forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those, who sin against us!* **Thanks be to IX our Lord. Amen.**