Voices of Sisters
Horizons
Spirituality



(Unsplash/La Fabbrica Dei Sogni)



by Sr. Adriana Pérez

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

May 1, 2026

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Forgiveness in religious life is not, at least for me, an abstract idea, but a concrete practice — one that is often demanding. It doesn’t always come naturally. At times it is difficult and painful. And yet, over time, I’ve come to see it as one of the deepest paths to freedom available to us.

Living in community is an incredible gift, but it is also a place where our weaknesses are exposed. Differences and friction come up in daily life together. We're not perfect; we are consecrated women who sometimes fall short. And in that very human space, forgiveness becomes necessary.

Looking back, I can see there were situations that felt unfair. At times, there were no clear explanations, which left me unsettled. There were also decisions and ways of acting that, over time, I came to see were not in line with the Gospel. At the time, though, I believed I had forgiven and moved on, confident in my path.

But as time went on, some of those experiences came back. They showed up in reactions I didn’t expect, in memories that still hurt. That’s when I began to realize, humbly, that not everything was as forgiven as I thought.

That realization wasn’t easy, but I needed it. I sensed that God was showing me that forgiveness doesn't happen once and for all. Sometimes we have to go back to it. There are parts of the heart that only time, prayer and grace can slowly heal.



(Unsplash/Nikola Johnny Mirkovic)

In those moments, I learned to do something simple: I placed that part of my story back in God’s hands. I named it in prayer, without softening it, and said, “Lord, this too belongs to you. Heal it.” Little by little, something inside me began to loosen.

Especially in the early years, I had a very simple understanding of forgiveness. I thought of it as something immediate: “I forgive, and that’s it.” At times, I also felt that forgiving meant forcing the heart, like an obligation I had to fulfill to be “good.”

Over time, life itself — and God in it — taught me something different. Forgiveness is a deeply human act and it doesn’t happen all at once. It grows and becomes more real over the years.

I also came to see that this more rigid view wasn’t mine alone. Many of us were formed in a context where forgiveness was closely tied to guilt or obligation. It was

often lived as a kind of sacrifice, sometimes even at one's own expense. Some older practices left more than one sister with the feeling that forgiveness meant being exposed. I'm thinking, for example, of public requests for forgiveness (*culpas*) that, instead of healing, sometimes caused harm.

I don't say this to judge the past, but because it's part of our history and something we still need to heal. When forgiveness is linked only to pain or punishment, something of its Gospel truth becomes blurred.

Some time ago, in conversation with a priest, something became clear to me in a very simple way. He said that in the sacrament of reconciliation, we often still think in terms of "penance," as if after asking for forgiveness, we still have to "pay" for something. He proposed another way to look at it: to think in terms of "anti-sin."

That idea stayed with me. Because "anti-sin" isn't a punishment, it's a life-giving response. It means choosing, in a concrete way, to do something that is good for me, something that brings me back to a truer, freer place. Something that reaches the heart and begins to reorder it from within.

Since then, I've started to see that forgiveness is also about restoration. It's not just about recognizing a mistake, but about letting something within me be put back in order.

Advertisement

There's a line in the Gospel that always challenges me: "Lord, how many times must I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus answers, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:21-22). For a long time, I heard that as an impossible demand. Now I hear it as an invitation not to keep score.

That doesn't mean ignoring what happened. It doesn't mean pretending nothing hurt or excusing what was unjust. For me, forgiving has meant — and still means — choosing not to stay stuck in the wound. It means opening an inner door so resentment doesn't have the last word, and trusting that God can bring something new even out of what broke me.

In religious life, forgiveness has a concrete face: the sister I share my life with. That makes it more real, but also more demanding. It's easy to love humanity in the

abstract; it’s much harder to love a real person, with her gifts but also her limitations.

It’s also important to learn to forgive parts of our own religious life that have shaped us: stages, communities, decisions and ways of acting. Some memories stay with us. Some experiences we handled as best we could at the time, but they don’t always fully resolve. Some days everything flows. Other days, the heart closes a bit. It’s important not to let it harden.

In the end, I believe forgiveness is a very concrete way of living charity. It shows in how we care for our relationships — even our relationship with our own story.

Little by little, I’m discovering that forgiveness also restores something in us — and that God gives back, in unexpected ways, a peace we thought we had lost, allowing us, again and again, to choose love and to be reconciled.