

## **Life-Changing Experience through SJD's Retreat: Develop a Forgiving Heart**

On early Friday afternoon, January 27, 2011, when I embarked on my annual journey to Camp Allen for SJD's Annual Retreat, I had neither desires nor expectations at, or from, this retreat. All I know is that I had a single room, was on my solo journey to the SJD's annual women's retreat, which I have loved. I was looking forward to the music, which is food to my soul, biblical teachings, dialogue, and respite in my already-requested and designated "single" room. I was looking forward to be in my desired and much-cherished private space. For a specific time period, I can quickly seek my private retreat and commune and converse with God alone. Wow! I could not wait to get to Camp Allen. My selfish need for solace and quietness forced me to choose a leisurely drive alone to Camp Allen – in my mind, alone in my car with some religious music, is what I call the beginning of a true and long-awaited retreat.

Over the years, even before I transferred to St. John the Divine in 2003, I was a regular attendee to the SJD's Women Retreat. I have made just about all retreats, have truly grown spiritually, bonded, made friends, and have indelibly loved the chosen music, which was AWESOME in 2011; learned from the biblical teachings; read by bible and books; rested; experience renewal and recovery; found respite; re-connected; and embraced new relationships and enjoyed my walk, laughter, outdoors Pilates (this was hysterical!) and conversations.

Yes, seriously, the 2011 retreat was the best retreat ever and I was deeply impacted. I was prepared to just let go and let God have His way with me. My ongoing project is effort toward my taking my hands off the steering wheel. I was going to be obedient to my spirit and the word – He is in charge of all things and I have no business trying to steer any wheel that will most likely drive to nowhere. But, while God was working on my letting go, I took a break from the meeting room. I have discovered that when God is mightily in the mix, He will send you on all sorts of "journeys". At the retreat, I was sent on a journey and when I re-entered the room after my break, I was immediately summoned to the front of the room, unwittingly, by the facilitator who asked me what message it is that I have for my sisters in the room. Uh, I said to myself, what is that question all about? Concurrently, I was having thoughts of running through the door while possessing the vivid appearance of a deer-in-the-headlights. But, I composed myself and before further thoughts, the word "forgiveness" came loudly flying out of my mouth – "my word for us today is forgiveness". What is going on here, oh Lord? Upon my blurting of "forgiveness", the room immediately had a fearful hush and the instant release of energy and emotions - all at once. I returned to my seat with utmost resolution – I am called to unequivocally forgive until my heart is meaningfully touched!

Except for one person, no one at retreat, or in that room, knew that I had been, for almost one year, praying and having unilateral conversations with God about forgiveness -- I must be obedient (*obedience is my favorite word*) to God and I MUST work on forgiveness. But, when one thinks that one is in charge, one's focus becomes myopic. My "face-to-face with God" in that room revealed to me that myopic approach is an error and that I MUST work on having a

total, full, and deep forgiving heart – forgiveness isn't just about the words from the lips. Forgiveness is all about deeply engaging the heart in the forgiveness process – developing a forgiving heart. From that single question at the retreat of “what did I have to tell my sisters in the room” came the revelation and understanding of my need to engage God, be obedient to the word, and fully engage the heart, in order to truly and honestly forgive.

We don't naturally overflow with mercy, grace, and forgiveness when we've been wronged. Forgiving is not easy, but the true power of forgiveness leads to unconditional healing and restoration of an “irreparably” broken someone or something and chrysalis. Receiving or granting forgiveness results in grace - when we follow and are obedient to God, we received grace. If we are forgiven by God for all of our sins and actions, how can we not forgive our brothers and sisters who are our biblical and earthly neighbors? An analysis of forgiveness has brought us full circle to the second greatest commandment that requires us to love our neighbors as ourselves. If we love our neighbors as God loves us, then affording forgiveness is unquestionable - we are required and commanded to forgive others. What do God and the bible say about forgiveness? What does forgiveness mean to you? Where are you on your forgiveness journey?

We forgive by faith, out of obedience. Since forgiveness goes against our natural tendencies, we must forgive by faith, whether we feel like it, want it, or not. It's not a one-time choice and then we automatically live in a state of forgiveness. Forgiveness may require a lifetime of forgiving, but it is important to the Lord. We must continue forgiving until the matter is settled in our heart. We must trust God to do the work in us that needs to be done so that the forgiveness will be complete. God and the SJD retreats await you – join us at the 2012 SJD retreat, it could just be where your life-changing and transformational experience germinate - be ye transformed!

### **Colossians**

**3:13**

*Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. [\(NIV\)](#)*

### **Matthew**

**18:21-22**

*Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. [\(NIV\)](#)*