Forgiveness

Over the past couple of weeks, there have been some serious health concerns with my friends and family.

First, our dear friend and neighbor, Jennifer Edwards, lost her second battle with breast cancer, leaving behind a husband, an adult daughter, and an 8-year-old son. Her death was a terrible loss for all who knew her and I was angry. Not with God but with cancer. Because too many people, celebrity and otherwise, are dropping dead from cancer and I was just angry.

The next week, a cousin of mine, whose mother lives with us, had a stroke. After being put in the Neuro ICU of the University of Maryland Medical Center, he went through brain surgery because of the resulting swelling on the brain. He has since been moved to a rehabilitation center.

Other things happened during that period of time as well, but those had the most impact on my mental and spiritual health. Yet again I was calling the church, asking for a priest and mass intention. Again, we have to find a way to comfort loved ones in circumstances that we cannot explain.

I can't tell Jennifer's son that what happened was fair. I can only offer the listening ear of someone who has also lost a parent.

Many times, when we experience tragedy and loss, our physical, spiritual, and mental health suffers. And not only does it suffer, but some people suffer for years before they connect their unhealthy and destructive habits with unresolved anger and guilt.

These unresolved feelings can lead to destructive behaviors that can be anything from alcohol and drug abuse, behavior destructive to you as a person, loss of control with money, and seeking comfort in unhealthy food.

But what strikes me most of all is how many people, when they suffer a loss of some

sort, blame themselves for all of the bad things that have gone on in their lives. A person who feels that way may not take the steps to heal themselves physically because they don't believe they are worthy of being better and feeling better. That's truly sad.

What's the solution? I know it begins with forgiveness.

When we hold on to the anger and hurt feelings of the things that have gone on in our lives, we limit the blessings of God. We can't let God in because there is no more room in our hearts.

Forgiveness is not for the other person or thing that hurt you, forgiveness is for yourself. It releases those negative feelings and allows us to go on with our lives experiencing the grace of God. We start to live again. We take better care of ourselves. We believe in our inherent worth as children of God. But this must start with forgiveness.

Take time over the next week and experience the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Confess what angers you and holds you back. Confess what keeps you feeling guilty and then let it go. That's what I had to do and continue to do!

Remember these words of Christ, "'Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.'" (Matthew 11:28-30, RSV)

Photo Courtesy Jennifer Edwards

Jennifer Edwards, loving wife and mother, Oct. 3, 1964 – June 6, 2012.