Growing up with three brothers, I remember a lot of forced apologies being exchanged back and forth between us. My parents would make us say the words before we were actually ready to apologize for (or forgive) whatever nastiness was inflicted that day. But however hurt or angry we were at the moment, there was never a question in our minds about whether we loved one another. We belonged to each other and wouldn’t have had it any other way. Being family and loving one another went hand-in-hand.

Love sees beyond what is broken, rude, selfish, or mean in the other person’s action and reaches out a hand to heal the relationship. By making my brothers and me practice forgiveness in the everyday offenses of life, my parents were leading us to understand mercy: it makes things right between us.

Throughout the Old Testament we see a cycle of betrayal and mercy played out between Israel and the Lord. Over and over, Israel abandons God for their own desires, but the Lord continually draws her back to himself because he chose her and he is faithful to the covenant he made. In the book of Hosea in particular, the relationship of a married couple is used to reveal the steadfastness of God’s love for Israel. No matter what she does, He remains faithful.

A sacramental marriage helps those who witness it to understand God’s fidelity to his people. Indissolubility is a gift of mercy, because it makes the relationship of the couple true to *what love is*: a complete gift of oneself that can’t be taken back. A person in love does not promise their beloved the next three years; they promise forever![[1]](#footnote-1) “The gift of indissolubility means that despite the vicissitudes and suffering that come with human failure and sin, the sacramental marriage bond remains an abiding source of mercy, forgiveness, and healing.”[[2]](#footnote-2) To deny the indissolubility of marriage would be an affront against the sacrament of marriage because it would deny the reality of grace and its power to heal and perfect a person.

I came across a beautiful reflection about marriage recently on a blog site. A woman was reflecting on her experience of learning to have mercy on her husband who was struggling with clinical depression. She said, “Through mercy, God taught me to love my husband as we all deserve to be loved—with a love devoid of self, thinking only of the good of the other person.”[[3]](#footnote-3) While her husband was sick, she, “picked up his cross for him, as Jesus does for us, and bore his malaise and withdrawal in loving silence.” By showing mercy rather than demanding justice, the couple was able to maintain peace and goodwill during his illness. Mercy itself is not a cure for depression, but it helped this couple to preserve their relationship in a difficult time. The wife realized that she needed to be kind and selfless, and not seek justice but rather have mercy, and finally when she did that, “But by the time it came, I no longer cared about justice.”

It can be said of the practice of reconciliation that it “washes away small offenses, but it also protects from great offenses. Pardon confers a *habitus* of communion.”[[4]](#footnote-4) Mercy towards siblings, in my case, and a husband in the case of the blog contributor is an expression of a disposition toward communion. It is a desire to be united to the other person, even after they have hurt you. A married couple that frequently seeks and offers mercy reinforces their “togetherness” or communion so that when serious trials arise they have already practiced drawing towards one another. The indissoluble bond of marriage not only calls a couple to be merciful toward each other, but indissolubility also reveals God’s own mercy, because when he binds two people together in the sacrament, he gives them the graces they need to live it out.

1. There is a new concept about marriage out there these days called a “wed-lease,” which turns marriage into something more like a business contract: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/a-high-divorce-rate-means-its-time-to-try-wedleases/2013/08/04/f2221c1c-f89e-11e2-b018-5b8251f0c56e_story.html>. This is not true to what love is. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Healy, N. (2014). The Merciful Gift of Indissolubility. *Communio International Catholic Review*, 41.2. Retrieved from <http://www.communio-icr.com/files/healy41-2.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “Ode to Feminine Genius: A Merciful Woman.” *Catholic Sistas.* Aug. 28, 2014. <http://www.catholicsistas.com/2014/08/ode-feminine-genius-merciful-woman/> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Laffitte, J.(2015). The Choice of the Family. New York: Image, p. 143. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)