

Scripture Study

Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle A



Opening prayer

Sirach 27:30—28:7

(Ps 103:1-4,9-12)

Romans 14:7-9

Matthew 18:21-35

Overview of the Gospel:

- Last week's Gospel was concerned with how to deal with those who persist in unrepentant sin or error (verses 15-20). Referring to the case where an offending party is repentant (see Luke 17:3-4) and asks forgiveness, Peter asks how often one should forgive them (verse 21). He suggests seven times—a generous amount compared to the general wisdom that a sin need not be forgiven after a third or fourth time.
- Jesus answers not just seven—but seventy-seven times (some translations render this “seventy times seven”, that is, 490 times!). Jesus is making the point that forgiveness to the repentant should be unlimited. This can be seen as a contrast to the evil Lamach's boast to enact unlimited vengeance upon those who crossed him (Genesis 4:24).
- Jesus' parable about the unforgiving servant likewise deals in unlimited forgiveness of an astronomical debt. What the New American Bible renders “a huge amount” is literally “10,000 talents”. A talent was worth about 6000 *denarii* (a *denarius* was a day's wage for a laborer). Thus the entire debt was 191,000 day's wages—an impossible amount to repay!
- Forgiven his debt by his compassionate master, this servant then goes on to refuse a fellow servant “a much smaller amount” (or, 100 denarii).
- Jesus compares the reaction of the unmerciful servant's master to how God will deal with those who not “forgive his brother from his heart” (see Matthew 6:14-15).

Questions:

- In the 1st Reading, what does the Sacred Writer say are some of the consequences of seeking vengeance and not forgiving others?
- What does the 2nd Reading tell us about the consequences of our earthly actions in eternity?
- What does Jesus' answer to Peter say about forgiveness in the kingdom?
- How does the parable of the unmerciful servant extend Jesus' teaching on forgiveness (verses 23-35)? In refusing to be forgiving to others, what do we deny ourselves (verses 31-34)?
- Based on this parable, is God's forgiveness of us limited or unlimited? Conditional or unconditional? What are the limits of your own willingness to forgive others? Do you forgive readily? If you find it difficult to forgive, what can you do about it?
- How can we forgive others while not encouraging irresponsibility? As part of forgiving someone, are you obliged to allow that person to victimize you?
- How can you forgive someone from the past who hurt you deeply?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 982, 2842—2845

Closing prayer

Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings!

Force yourself, if necessary, to always forgive those who offend you from the very first moment. For the greatest injury or offense that you can suffer from them is nothing compared to what God has pardoned you. - St. Josemaria Escriva

"Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?"

Scripture: *Matthew 18:21-35*

Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven. "Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began the reckoning, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents; and as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him the lord of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But that same servant, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat he said, 'Pay what you owe.' So his fellow servant fell down and besought him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' He refused and went and put him in prison till he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you besought me; and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his lord delivered him to the jailers, till he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every



one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

Meditation: How does mercy and justice go together? The prophet Amos speaks of God forgiving transgression three times, but warns that God may not revoke punishment for the fourth (see Amos 1:3-13; 2:1-6). When Peter posed the question of forgiveness, he characteristically offered an answer he thought Jesus would be pleased with. Why not forgive seven times! How unthinkable for Jesus to counter with the proposition that one must forgive seventy times that. Jesus made it clear that there is no reckonable limit to forgiveness. And he drove the lesson home with a parable about two very different kinds of debts. The first man owed an enormous sum of money -- millions in our currency. In Jesus' time this amount was greater than the total revenue of a province -- more than it would cost to ransom a king! The man who was forgiven such an incredible debt could not, however bring himself to forgive his neighbor a very small debt which was about one-hundred-thousandth of his own debt. The contrast could not have been greater! No offence our neighbor can do to us can compare

with our debt to God! We have been forgiven a debt which is beyond all paying; to ransom our debt of sin God gave up his only begotten Son. If God has forgiven each of us our debt, which was very great, we, too must forgive others the debt they owe us.

Jesus teaches that one must forgive in order to be forgiven. If we do not forgive one another, how can we expect God to forgive us! James says that *judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy* (James 2:13). Mercy is truly a gift and it is offered in such a way that justice is not negated. Mercy "seasons" justice as "salt" seasons meat and gives it flavor. Mercy follows justice and perfects it. To pardon the unrepentant is not mercy but license. C.S. Lewis, a 20th century Christian author wrote: "Mercy will flower only when it grows in the crannies of the rock of Justice: transplanted to the marshlands of mere Humanitarianism, it becomes a man-eating weed, all the more dangerous because it is still called by the same name as the mountain variety." If we want mercy shown to us we must be ready to forgive others as God has forgiven us. Do you allow any grudge or resentment to keep you from treating others with love and forbearance?

"Lord, you have been kind and forgiving towards me. May I be merciful as you are merciful. Free me from all bitterness and resentment that I may truly forgive from the heart all who have caused me injury or grief."

Meditation: © 2011 Don Schwager
www.rc.net/wcc/reading

