



24TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY - SEPTEMBER 13, 2020

From the Pastor

We owe a very great deal to the fact that Peter had a quick tongue. Over and again he rushed into speech in such a way that his hastiness drew from Jesus' teaching which is immortal. On this occasion Peter thought that he was being very generous. He asked Jesus how often he ought to forgive his brother, and then answered his own question by suggesting that he should forgive seven times.

Peter was not without warrant for this suggestion. The Rabbinic teaching was that a man must forgive his brother three times. Peter thought that he was going very far, for he doubles the Rabbinic teaching, for good measure and adds one, and suggests, with eager self-satisfaction, that it will be enough if he forgives seven times. Peter expected to be warmly commended; but Jesus' answer was that the Christian must forgive seventy times seven. In other words there is no reckonable limit to forgiveness. It teaches that lesson which runs through all the New Testament – a man must forgive in order to be forgiven. He who will not forgive his fellow-men cannot hope that God will forgive him.

In Hebrew the figure of seventy times seven means the same as “always” (cf. Gen 4:24). Therefore, our Lord did not limit forgiveness to a fixed number, but declared that it must be continuous and forever. Here we can see the contrast between man's ungenerous, calculating approach to forgiveness, and God's infinite mercy. The parable clearly shows that we are totally in God's debt. A talent was the equivalent of six thousand denarii, and a denarius a working man's daily wage. Ten thousand talents, an enormous sum, gives us an idea of the immense value attaching to the pardon we receive from God. Overall, the parable teaches that we must always forgive our brothers, and must do so wholeheartedly.

“Force yourself, if necessary, always to forgive those who offend you, from the very first moment. For the greatest injury or offense that you can suffer from them is as nothing compared with what God has pardoned you” (St. Josemaria Escriva, *The Way*, 452).

The ungrateful servant in today's Gospel would make us indignant and angry. He could be explained as vile and inhuman. How could he fail to understand the goodness of the king from which he has just benefited? How could he be so insensitive to the plea of his fellow servant who owed him only a trivial sum and was pleading for some relief! But the anger melts away and is replaced by shame and fear as I realize that I could be that unforgiving servant deserving your stern judgment! Time and again when I have failed to forgive my offenders I too have proved myself ungrateful and unmindful of the numerous times you showed your mercy on me and forgave my debts.

We have been forgiven a debt which is beyond all paying – for the sin of man brought about the death of God's own Son – and, if that is so we must forgive others as God has forgiven us, or we never can hope to find mercy.

Peter's question and particularly Jesus' reply prescribe the spirit of understanding and mercy which should govern Christians' behavior.

Yours in Christ,
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