



FAITH CIRCLES

WEEKLY SMALL GROUP CATECHESIS

24TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME • YEAR A

SUNDAY GOSPEL

Forgiveness of injuries

MATTHEW 18:21-35

‘And so the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who decided to settle his accounts with his servants. When the reckoning began, they brought him a man who owed ten thousand talents; but he had no means of paying, so his master gave orders that he should be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, to meet the debt. At this, the servant threw himself down at his master’s feet. “Give me time,” he said, “and I will pay the whole sum.” And the servant’s master felt so sorry for him that he let him go and cancelled the debt. Now as this servant went out, he happened to meet a fellow servant who owed him one hundred denarii; and he seized him by the throat and began to throttle him. “Pay what you owe me,” he said.



The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant by Pieter Coecke Van Aelst

His fellow servant fell at his feet and implored him, saying, “Give me time and I will pay you.” But the other would not agree; on the contrary, he had him thrown into prison till he should pay the debt. His fellow servants were deeply distressed when they saw what had happened, and they went to their master and reported the whole affair to him. Then the master sent for him. “You wicked servant,” he said, “I cancelled

all that debt of yours when you appealed to me. Were you not bound, then, to have pity on your fellow servant just as I had pity on you?” And in his anger the master handed him over to the torturers till he should pay all his debt. And that is how my heavenly Father will deal with you unless you each forgive your brother from your heart.’ ■

GOSPEL REFLECTION

Mr Sean Donovan

Chairperson – Macarthur Social Justice Network



Greg is always telling anyone who will listen how he is badly done by. Every perceived slight is magnified out of proportion and carried around as baggage; baggage that he tries to load onto other “helpful” people. They ultimately tire

of it and turn away as well, creating more material for his baggage.

We all know people like Greg. They won’t forgive slights and feel they are owed something. But in the end their self-justifying baggage weighs only them down.

Jesus offers a different perspective. God has brought and maintains the entire universe in existence. We do not exist except through God. The debt we owe to God is so much greater than any earthly debt we may

think is owed to us. By holding onto our grudges we are like the petty man in the parable, not forgiving the lesser debt, and ultimately paying the price.

Seeing this way helps us forgive others from the heart, not just once, not seven times, but every time. We no longer need to carry around the burdens because we no longer create those burdens in the first place. Can you forgive from the heart? ■

A WORD FROM POPE FRANCIS



The following reflection by Pope Francis is entitled 'Merciful like the Father'. It was based on Luke 6:36-38 but takes up the themes of mercy and forgiveness found in today's gospel.

We have heard the passage from the Gospel of Luke (6:36-38) that inspired the motto of the extraordinary Holy Year: Merciful like the Father. The complete phrase reads: "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful". It is not a catchphrase, but a life commitment.

We ask ourselves: What does it mean for disciples to be merciful? Jesus explains this with two verbs: "forgive" and "give".

Mercy is expressed, first of all, in forgiveness: "Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven" (Lk 6:37). Jesus does not intend to undermine the course of human justice, he does, however, remind his disciples that in order to have fraternal relationships they must suspend judgment and condemnation. Forgiveness, in fact, is

the pillar that holds up the life of the Christian community, because it shows the gratuitousness with which God has loved us first.

The Christian must forgive! Why? Because he has been forgiven. All of us who are here today, in the Square, we have been forgiven. There is not one of us who, in our own life, has had no need of God's forgiveness. And because we have been forgiven, we must forgive. We recite this every day in the Our Father: "Forgive us our sins; forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us". That is, to forgive offenses, to forgive many things, because we have been forgiven of many offenses, of many sins. In this way it is easy to forgive: if God has forgiven me, why do I not forgive others? Am I greater than God? This pillar of forgiveness shows us the gratuitousness of the love of God, who loved us first. Judging and condemning a brother who sins is wrong. Not because we do not want to recognize sin, but because condemning the sinner breaks the bond of fraternity with him and spurns the mercy of God, who does not want to renounce any of his children. We do not have the power to condemn our erring brother,

we are not above him: rather, we have a duty to recover the dignity of a child of the Father and to accompany him on his journey of conversion.

Jesus also indicates a second pillar to us who are his Church: "to give". Forgiveness is the first pillar; giving is the second pillar. "Give, and it will be given to you.... For the measure you give will be the measure you get back" (v. 38). God gives far beyond our merits, but He will be even more generous with those who have been generous on earth. Jesus does not say what will happen to those who do not give, but the image of the "measure" is a warning: with the measure that we give, it is we who determine how we will be judged, how we will be loved. If we look closely, there is a coherent logic: the extent to which you receive from God, you give to your brother, and the extent to which you give to your brother, you will receive from God!

Merciful love is therefore the only way forward. We all have a great need to be a bit more merciful, to not speak ill of others, to not judge, to not "sting" others with criticism, with envy and jealousy. We must forgive, be merciful, and live our lives with love. ■

TALKING POINTS

1. Sin is real and the Church is charged with preaching the Gospel of repentance, which opens us to God's unfathomable mercy. But, as Pope Francis highlights in this week's reflection, 'Judging and condemning a brother who sins is wrong. Not because we do not want to recognize sin.' We all are sinners. How are we in our lives called to balance hating sin, but loving sinners, ourselves included?
2. Our reflections on the Gospel urge us to consider how we engage with God's generosity of love and forgiveness, both in the way we receive it and the way we share it. Pope Francis almost calls us to pay it forward stating 'there is a coherent logic: the extent to which you receive from God, you give to your brother, and the extent to which you give to your brother, you will receive from God!'

PRAYER POINTS

Pray for Each Other: Ask about and pray for the needs of the group members. Individuals might pray for themselves or ask someone else to pray for them.

Response: *Lord, let your mercy be on us as we place our trust in you.*

Reflect: The maxim "Hate the sin, but love the sinner" is an oft-used term. Are we sometimes guilty of reaching for God's mercy, but doling out judgments on others? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you pray for someone who you have judged, and ask for an outpouring of grace on them.

Closing Prayer: Lord your mercy flies to a repentant heart. Root out the sin in our own lives and our judgment of others. Let love be our first response in all things. Amen.