

GOSPEL*Matthew 18:21-35*

Peter went up to Jesus and said, 'Lord, how often must I forgive my brother if he wrongs me? As often as seven times?' Jesus answered, 'Not seven, I tell you, but seventy-seven times.'

'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. 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.'

REFLECTION BY ST JOHN PAUL II*16 September 1984, Excerpt*

In the Gospel of this Twenty-fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time, Peter asks Jesus the questions: "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'" (Matth. 18, 21-22).

"Seventy times seven": with this reply the Lord wants to make it clear to Peter and to us that we should set no limit to our forgiveness of others. Just as the Lord is always be ready to forgive us, so we must always be ready to forgive one another. And how great is the need for forgiveness and reconciliation in our world today - indeed in our communities and families, in our very own hearts! That is why the special sacrament of the Church for forgiveness, the Sacrament of Penance, is such a precious gift from the Lord.

In the Sacrament of Penance, God extends his forgiveness to us in a very personal way. Through the ministry of the priest, we come to our loving Saviour with the burden of our sins. We confess that we have sinned against God and our neighbour. We manifest our sorrow and ask for pardon from the Lord. Then, through the priest, we hear Christ say to us: "Your sins are forgiven" (Marc. 2, 5); "Go, and do not sin again" (Io. 8, 11). Can we not also hear him say to us as we are filled with his saving grace: "Extend to others, seventy times seven, this same forgiveness and mercy"?

This is the work of the Church in every age - it is the duty of each one of us - "to profess and proclaim God's mercy in all its truth" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II, Dives in Misericordia, 13), to extend to whomever we meet each day the same unlimited forgiveness that we have received from Christ. We practice mercy, too, when we "bear with one another charitably, in complete selflessness, gentleness and patience" (Eph. 4, 2). And God's mercy is also shown by generous and untiring service, like that required in offering health care for the sick or in carrying out medical research with persevering dedication.

On this day of the Lord when we celebrate the fullest expression of God's abundant mercy - the Cross and Resurrection of Christ - let us praise our God who is rich in mercy. And, in imitation of his great love, let us forgive anyone who may have hurt us in any way. With the Blessed Mother of God, we proclaim the mercy of God which extends from generation to generation.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



Head: Jesus tells Peter to forgive "seventy-seven times." What does this teach us about the nature of Christian forgiveness?



Heart: St John Paul II reminds us that God has forgiven us an immeasurable debt. Is there a hurt, resentment, or grudge that you find difficult to surrender to God's mercy?



Hands: St John Paul II calls us to extend to others the same mercy we have received from Christ. What is one concrete step you can take this week towards forgiveness, reconciliation, or mercy?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another:

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (for example, "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Offer prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps praying the 'Glory Be'.