



Twenty-fourth Sunday of the Year A

Matthew 18:21-35

21 Peter went up to Jesus and said, 'Lord, how often must I forgive my brother if he wrongs me? As often as seven times?' 22 Jesus answered 'Not seven, I tell you, but seventy-seven times.

23 'And so the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who decided to settle his accounts with his servants. 24 When the reckoning began, they brought him a man who owed ten thousand talents; 25 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. 26 At this, the servant threw himself down at his master's feet. "Give me time," he said, "and I will pay the whole sum." 27 And the servant's master felt so sorry for him that he let him go and cancelled the debt. 28 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. 29 His fellow servant fell at his feet and implored him, saying, "Give me time and I will pay you". 30 But the other would not agree; on the contrary, he had him thrown into prison till he should pay the debt. 31 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 32 Then the master sent for him. "You wicked servant," he said, "I cancelled all that debt of yours when you appealed to me. 33 Were you not bound, then, to have pity on your fellow servant just as I had pity on you?" 34 And in his anger the master handed him over to the torturers till he should pay all his debt. 35 And that is how my heavenly Father will deal with you unless you each forgive your brother from your heart.'

Other readings: Ecclesiasticus 27:30 – 28:7 Psalm 102 (103) Romans 14:7-9

Jesus' fourth great speech in the Gospel of Matthew, found in chapter 18 of the gospel, is the 'community discourse'. The final section of this speech is the lengthy parable of the unforgiving debtor, which is provoked by Peter's question about forgiveness.

What does it mean to forgive? The saying 'forgive and forget' is easily spoken but so difficult to implement. Many people feel confused by it. If someone has inflicted a profound wrong it is virtually impossible for the victim to forget, nor should he or she be expected to. But what about forgiving? Forgiving does not mean dismissing the evil committed or the hurt suffered. It is about not requiring a pay-back from the perpetrator, some kind of retribution, but rather seeking his or her forgiveness and healing. This is the hard challenge to follow Jesus in forgiving as he forgave as he hung on the cross. It is the challenge to behave not as human beings do but in imitation of the very mercy of God.

Is it possible to forgive and forget when the hurt is lasting and deep?

Is there someone to whom I can offer forgiveness in my heart today?

Let us pray for wisdom to understand that we are called to imitate God's compassion.

Let us pray for those whose lives are ruined by bitterness.