

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time



We can only claim something as a gift if we are willing to give it away, and this week we are called to reflect on our capacity to forgive. We are continually being challenged by situations which require mercy and forgiveness. Throughout the gospels, Jesus is abundantly clear about how important it is that we forgive others.

Recovery literature offers a strategy to help overcome resentments when they appear, even if we feel justified in our anger: “We realized that the people who wronged us were perhaps spiritually sick. Though we did not like their symptoms and the way these disturbed us, they, like ourselves, were sick too. We asked God to help us show them the same tolerance, pity, and patience that we would cheerfully grant a sick friend. When a person offended we said to ourselves, ‘This is a sick man. How can I be helpful to him? God save me from being angry. Thy will be done’” (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, p. 66).

Last week, we heard Jesus speak about fraternal correction. Remember, we are directed to speak to the person who has offended us, including a few others if he does not respond one-on-one. If a small group does not change his behavior, tell the Church and invite community prayer. If that is ineffective, set up healthy boundaries, but continue to treat the person with dignity and mercy. Doing nothing other than building a resentment is far from the Christian way.

Of course, the disciples have follow-up questions, which prompts Jesus to double-down on his demand to repeatedly forgive:

*Peter approached Jesus and asked him,
“Lord, if my brother sins against me,
how often must I forgive?
As many as seven times?”*

Jesus answered, “I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times.”

While it is always nice to hear someone say, “I forgive you,” we find deep spiritual relief when we can find forgiveness in our own hearts—for others and for ourselves. We recognize resentment as a primary source of relapse and a path to old patterns of behavior, stealing peace and serenity from us like a thief. Too often we reach for a cheap sexual release to deal with resentment, which only furthers our misery. Jesus paints a picture to make this point clear and invites us to question how we are returning the merciful love of God back to others:

That is why the kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king who decided to settle accounts with his servants.

When he began the accounting, a debtor was brought before him who owed him a huge amount.

Since he had no way of paying it back, his master ordered him to be sold, along with his wife, his children, and all his property, in payment of the debt.

At that, the servant fell down, did him homage, and said,

'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back in full.'
Moved with compassion the master of that servant let him go and forgave him the loan.

When that servant had left, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a much smaller amount.

He seized him and started to choke him, demanding, 'Pay back what you owe.'

Falling to his knees, his fellow servant begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.'

But he refused.

Instead, he had the fellow servant put in prison until he paid back the debt.

Now when his fellow servants saw what had happened, they were deeply disturbed, and went to their master and reported the whole affair.

His master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant!

I forgave you your entire debt because you begged me to.

Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant, as I had pity on you?'

Then in anger his master handed him over to the torturers until he should pay back the whole debt.

So will my heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives your brother from your heart."

- Is there a recurring, untreated resentment that you have been holding on to?
 - If so, what can you actively do to find freedom from the weight of your grudge?

- Can you relate to the journey of the forgiven servant in this Sunday's Gospel Reading?
 - Explain how God's mercy for you has made you more forgiving and merciful.

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Sunday Mass Readings this Week

1st Reading: Sirach 27:30-28:7

Responsorial Psalm: Ps 103:1-2, 3-4, 9-10, 11-12

2nd Reading: Romans 14:7-9

Gospel: Matthew 18:21-35