

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

John 13:34

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

I give you a new commandment, says the Lord;
love one another as I have loved you.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Matt 18:21-35; L130A

**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.**

**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.**



Reflecting on the Gospel

One of the first prayers many of us learn as small children is the Our Father. We pray it every time we participate at Mass. We pray it every time we say the rosary. But like so many things that are repetitious, we can recite this beautiful prayer taught us by Jesus himself by rote, not really thinking about the words we pray and the relationships they imply. The gospel this Sunday is a kind of commentary on one part of the Our Father: “and forgive us our debts, / as we forgive our debtors” (Matt 6:12, NABRE), but it is a commentary with a twist. In the Our

Father God’s forgiveness of us is contingent on our forgiving others. In the gospel parable, the servant has already been forgiven his debt to this master, which makes his hard and unforgiving heart toward “one of his fellow servants who owed him a much smaller amount” even that much more reprehensible.

Life in the church demands that we forgive one another not only because it is the compassionate thing to do, but because this is how God acts and expects us to act (see the last line of the gospel). It belongs to the very “being” of God to forgive; if we are of God, then it is also of our very “being” to forgive. The key to understanding this is that we are in relationship both with God and with each other. By forgiving we choose not to let any offense that has happened between us control how we continue to relate to one another. By forgiving we repair the damage to the relationship and restore dignity both to the forgiver and to the forgiven. This is why counting how many times we forgive—even to the seven that Peter suggests at the beginning of the gospel—misses the point. Jesus’ response to Peter is a way of reminding us that God

forgives us countless times, and this is the motivation for forgiving each other equally countless times. Our “heavenly Father” has shown us the way—forgive one another “from [the] heart.”

Jesus tells a striking parable in this gospel about two instances of forgiveness of debts—one lavishly given, the other miserly withheld. We can learn how to bring freshness to our praying of the Our Father from this parable. The implication made in the parable is that God acts like the extravagant king. But not so. God’s forgiveness of us is always even beyond extravagance, even beyond measure. We measure; God does not. As infinite as God’s forgiveness is, to receive it is not without a substantial condition. We are to forgive one another as God forgives—from the heart, “seventy-seven times.” Only forgiveness that comes from the heart is immeasurable. Let us pray the Our Father with great fervor!

Living the Paschal Mystery

The second reading for this Sunday speaks in its own way of why we forgive one another: “None of us lives for oneself” because we “live for the Lord.” Our relationship to each other is described in terms of our relationship to God. Forgiveness is absolutely central to the message of the whole gospel because it is necessary in order for our relationships with God and each other continually to grow stronger and more graceful.

Christ’s dying and rising models for us our own dying and rising: “no one dies for oneself.” We always die (to ourselves) for the sake of the other. Forgiving entails dying to damaged relationships so that we might all belong to the Lord and rise to every new Life with him. Forgiving means God has hold of us and enables us to act in a Godlike manner. Forgiving means that the cost of reconciling petty hurts or even major ruptures pale in comparison to the immeasurable forgiveness of God.

Continued in Appendix A, p. 297.

Focusing the Gospel

Key words and phrases: seventy-seven times, owed him a huge amount, forgave him, unless each of you forgives . . . from your heart

To the point: Jesus tells a striking parable about two instances of forgiveness of debts—one lavishly given, the other miserly withheld. The implication is that God acts like the extravagant king. But not so. God’s forgiveness of us is always even beyond extravagance, even beyond measure. We measure; God does not. As infinite as God’s forgiveness is, to receive it is not without a substantial condition. We are to forgive one another as God forgives—from the heart, “seventy-seven times.” Only forgiveness that comes from the heart is immeasurable.

Connecting the Gospel

to the first reading: Sirach is teaching exactly what Jesus is teaching with the parable in the gospel: we cannot expect our sins to be forgiven unless we forgive another’s injustice; we cannot expect healing of our anger if we harbor anger; we cannot receive pardon if we refuse mercy to another.

to experience: Grudges among families, communities, nations are often passed on from generation to generation. For example, family feuds go on for decades during which time members do not speak to each other. The only thing that can break the cycle of hate, fear, and disunity is the gift of forgiveness—from the heart, “seventy-seven times.”

Connecting the Responsorial Psalm

to the readings: The refrain of this Sunday’s responsorial psalm, “The Lord is kind and merciful, slow to anger, and rich in compassion,” was first spoken not about God but by God as direct revelation to Moses: this is my name—Lord—and this is who I am—merciful, gracious, compassionate (cf. Exod 34:5-6.) The phrase appears so often in the Hebrew Scriptures that it is called “the little creed,” a capsule profession of who God is and how God relates to us.

In singing this psalm we profess “the little creed” as our own. We name the nature of God. And we proclaim the nature of our covenant relationship with one another: as God forgives us, so we are to forgive one another (first reading). Like God we are to put transgressions behind us “[a]s far as the east is from the west” (psalm). We are to forgive one another no matter how great or small the debt, and no matter how many times it is necessary (gospel). The call is mandatory, not optional. May our singing of this psalm transform our hearts and our behavior.

Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, September 17, 2017

Gospel (cont.)

Matt 18:21-35; L130A

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.”

ASSEMBLY & FAITH-SHARING GROUPS

- I struggle with forgiving . . . when . . . because . . .
- I experience God’s immeasurable forgiveness when . . . I offer this same forgiveness to others when . . .
- I have been surprised by the gift of forgiveness when . . . This has drawn me to . . .

PRESIDERS

I find it easiest to preach forgiveness when . . . I am challenged in my preaching forgiveness when . . .

DEACONS

I make visible God’s immeasurable compassion and forgiveness through my service of others when I . . .

HOSPITALITY MINISTERS

My manner of greeting those who are assembling helps them to open themselves to God’s immeasurable forgiveness when I . . .

MUSIC MINISTERS

To do my music ministry well, I need to forgive . . . God shows me how by . . .

ALTAR MINISTERS

A forgiving heart affects my relationship with others and helps me serve at the altar better in that . . .

LECTORS

When I faithfully sit with God’s word and receive it in my heart, I become . . .

EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION

I offer the bread and cup of compassion and forgiveness in my daily living whenever I . . .