

Lord, How Often Shall I Forgive My Brother?

GOSPEL READING: Matthew 18:21-35

21 Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" 22 Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven. 23 "Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. 24 When he began the reckoning, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents; 25 and as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. 26 So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' 27 And out of pity for him the lord of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.

28 But that same servant, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat he said, 'Pay what you owe.' 29 So his fellow servant fell down and besought him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' 30 He refused and went and put him in prison till he should pay the debt. 31 When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. 32 Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you besought me; 33 and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' 34 And in anger his lord delivered him to the jailers, till he should pay all his debt. 35 So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

Meditation: Does mercy overlook justice? Justice demands that everyone be given their due. So, when is it right to show mercy and pardon to those who have acted unjustly or wrongly? The prophet Amos speaks of God forgiving transgression three times but warns that God may not revoke punishment for the fourth (see Amos 1:3-13; 2:1-6). When Peter posed the question of forgiveness, he characteristically offered an answer he thought Jesus would be pleased with. Why not forgive seven times! How unthinkable for Jesus to counter with the proposition that one must forgive seventy times that.

No limit to granting forgiveness and pardon

Jesus makes it clear that there is no limit to giving and receiving forgiveness. He drove the lesson home with a parable about two very different kinds of debts. The first man owed an enormous sum of money - millions in our currency. In Jesus' time this amount was greater than the total revenue of a province - more than it would cost to ransom a king! The man who was forgiven such an incredible debt could not, however, bring himself to forgive his neighbour a very small debt which was about one-hundred-thousandth of his own debt. The contrast could not have been greater!

Jesus paid our ransom to set us free from the debt of sin

No offense our neighbour can do to us can compare with our own personal debt to God for offending him! We have been forgiven an enormous debt we could not repay on our own. That is why the Father in heaven sent his only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who freely and willingly gave up his life for our sake to ransom us from slavery to sin, Satan, and death. Paul the Apostle states, "you were bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 7:23) and that price was Jesus' death on the cross. Through the shedding of his blood on the cross, Jesus not only brought forgiveness and pardon for our offenses, but release from our captivity to Satan and bondage to sin.

Forgiving others is a sacred duty

If God has shown mercy to us in granting us pardon for our sins, then we, in turn, must show mercy and

forgiveness towards every person who has offended us. The willingness to forgive those who offend us is a sacred duty. If we expect God to pardon us and show us his mercy when we sin and disobey his commandments, then we must be willing to let go of any resentment, grievance, or ill-will we feel towards our neighbour. Jesus teaches us to pray daily for the grace and strength to forgive others in the same measure in which God has forgiven us (Matthew 6:12,14-15). If we do not show mercy and forgiveness to our fellow human beings, how can we expect God to forgive us in turn? The Apostle James says that "*judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy*" (James 2:13).

Mercy seasons justice and perfects it

Mercy is the flip side of God's justice. Without mercy justice is cold, calculating, and even cruel. Mercy seasons justice assault seasons meat and gives it flavour. Mercy follows justice and perfects it. Justice demands that the wrong be addressed. To show mercy without addressing the wrong and to pardon the unrepentant is not true mercy but license. C.S. Lewis, a 20th century Christian author wrote: "Mercy will flower only when it grows in the crannies of the rock of Justice: transplanted to the marshlands of mere Humanitarianism, it becomes a man-eating weed, all the more dangerous because it is still called by the same name as the mountain variety." If we want mercy shown to us we must be ready to forgive others from the heart as God has forgiven us. Do you hold any grudge or resentment towards anyone? Ask the Lord to purify your heart that you may show mercy and loving-kindness to all - and especially to those who cause you grief and ill-will.

Daily Quote from the Early Church Fathers: *How often shall I forgive?* by Hilary of Poitiers (315-367 AD)

"When Peter asked him whether he should forgive his brother sinning against him up to seven times, the Lord replied, 'Not up to seven times but up to seventy times seven times'" In every way he teaches us to be like him in humility and goodness. In weakening and breaking the impulses of our rampant passions he strengthens us by the example of his leniency, by granting us in faith pardon of all our sins. For the vices of our nature did not merit pardon. Therefore, all pardon comes from him. In fact, he pardons even those sins that remain in one after confession. The penalty to be paid through Cain was established at sevenfold, but that sin was against a man, against his brother Abel, to the point of murder (Genesis 4:8). But in Lamech the penalty was established at seventy times seven times (Genesis 4:24), and, as we believe, the penalty was established on those responsible for the Lord's Passion. But the Lord through the confession of believers grants pardon for this crime. By the gift of baptism, he grants the grace of salvation to his reviles and persecutors. How much more is it necessary, he shows, that pardon be returned by us without measure or number. And we should not think how many times we forgive, but we should cease to be angry with those who sin against us, as often as the occasion for anger exists. Pardon's frequency shows us that in our case there is never a time for anger since God pardons us for all sins in their entirety by his gift rather than by our merit. Nor should we be excused from the requirement of giving pardon that number of times [i.e., seventy times seven], since through the grace of the gospel God has granted us pardon without measure." (excerpt from *ON MATTHEW 18.10*)

OPENING PRAYER: - Lord Jesus, you have been kind and forgiving towards me. May I be merciful as you are merciful. Free me from all bitterness and resentment that I may truly forgive from the heart those who have caused me injury or grief. Amen

CLOSING PRAYER:- "World Peace" Lord, we pray for the victims of the recent Earthquake in Marrakesh Morocco and that they have the resolve to rebuild their lives and homes after the forces of nature have turned against them, also the war in Ukraine that those effected have the strength to go on and the leaders of both countries find a peaceful resolution to this war. Amen.