

LOOKING AT LIFE THROUGH THE LENS OF THE GOSPEL



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**TWENTY FOURTH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

13th SEPTEMBER 2026

Matt. 18:21 Then Peter came and said to him, “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” ²² Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

²³ “For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴ When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; ²⁵ and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. ²⁶ So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ ²⁷ And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸ But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, ‘Pay what you owe.’ ²⁹ Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ ³⁰ But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. ³¹ When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, 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 slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?’ ³⁴ And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. ³⁵ So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

This Gospel is helpful in several ways, contrasting as it does everyday human logic with the logic of God’s forgiveness. First of all, we get a window on life in the early church, with its challenges and emerging structures. Secondly, the problems raised have not gone away — conflict like this is evidently normal. Thirdly, as a result, the passage speaks to us today. Scholars do wonder who is being addressed in this discourse—all disciples or chiefly the leadership? It must be all, but the leadership is in the frame as well. The message is clear: God’s pardon is the foundation for fraternal pardon and, yes, God’s extraordinary pardon obliges extraordinary pardon in return.

Verse 35 The teaching is generalised and anticipates the judgment parables in Matthew 23-25. It is initially a warning. But there is something deeper. God’s grace is a gift which we can never, ever earn. We can, however, lose it. Matthew teaches that if forgiveness does not become part of who we are, we become in a way incapable of receiving it even from God.

Thought for the day

“The world needs forgiveness; too many people are caught up in resentment and harbour hatred because they are incapable of forgiving. They ruin their own lives and the lives of those around them rather than finding the joy of serenity and peace.” (Pope Francis in Assisi in 2016) His point is that those who do not forgive, who hold on to resentment, hurt themselves almost as much, even if they are unaware of it for a while.

KIERAN O’MAHONY OSA - www.tarsus.ie

While everybody can agree that loving your neighbour is a good thing to do, it is only when we come to specifics that we realise how difficult it can be. The ability to forgive is probably the greatest evidence of the presence of Christian love, for it is something that we cannot be commanded to do. It must come from within and is evidence that the Spirit of Jesus lives in us.

SEAN GOAN - Let the Reader Understand

REFLECTION ON THE PARABLE

A parable is an imaginative story which we enter with our feelings. We identify with the various characters as the story unfolds, until at a certain point it strikes us: "I know that feeling!" This is a moment of truth, when we say, "I now understand grace and celebrate the times when I or others have lived it," or "I now understand sin and experience a call to conversion."

In this parable we see a man who is in a position of total helplessness; he is made to feel worthless, he has neither dignity nor freedom. His life, and that of his entire family, is in the hands of this king who makes him grovel before he will condescendingly set him free of his debts. He is not a bad man: he has been generous enough to lend money to someone who is in even greater need than he is, knowing full well that sooner or later he will have to return his own loan to the king.

The problem with him is that his spirit has been broken by oppression. Hardship has extinguished the spark of generosity. Experience tells us how frequently this happens. He has been made to feel so helpless and impotent that when he finds someone with even less power than himself he oppresses him in turn.

The king also is a victim of oppression. He breaks out of the oppressive world when he forgives his servant (even though we can detect some condescension), but it doesn't last. The servant's meanness defeats him, he takes back his generous spirit and becomes as mean as the servant. Very different from our God!

The parable then makes us reflect on oppression, understood quite correctly as being indebted. What a terrible thing oppression is! It keeps everyone in bondage - the oppressed and the oppressors alike. It isn't God who keeps us in bondage, but we ourselves, and the parable tells us that we will continue in this bondage, "handed over to torturers", unless someone makes a breakthrough and replaces meanness with generosity of spirit, the spirit of forgiveness, permanent and unconditional, "from our hearts."

MICHEL DE VERTEUIL - Lectio Divina on the Sunday Gospels

To refuse forgiveness sometimes seems like a normal, even a fair reaction to injury, humiliation, or injustice. But that is not the way to humanise the world. A marriage without mutual understanding is destroyed; a family without forgiveness becomes a hell; a society without forgiveness becomes inhuman.

Psychologists have described a defence mechanism that leads victims of aggression to imitate their aggressor in some ways. It is an unconscious, almost instinctive, individual or collective reaction that can even be passed on from generation to generation. Unless the cycle is broken at some point, evil becomes self-perpetuating. When victims cannot or will not forgive, they are left with an unhealed wound that goes on harming them, by repeating the harm of the past. The same thing happens in society, preventing it from finding ways to live together, and eventually blocking all efforts to resolve its conflicts.

Sometimes we forget that forgiveness does the most good to the forgivers. It releases them from the hurt, increases their dignity and nobility, gives them the strength to rebuild their lives, and lets them start over again. When Jesus says that we should forgive seventy-seven times, he is showing us the healthiest, most effective way to uproot evil from our lives.

The dynamic of forgiveness includes an effort to overcome evil with good. The act of forgiveness qualitatively changes the relationship between the people involved, and seeks to establish a new and different kind of life together. For that reason forgiveness is to only an individual act, but also has social implications.

JOSÉ A PAGOLA - The Way Opened up by Jesus

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. Jesus surprised Peter by telling him he needed to forgive seventy-seven times. Perhaps you have known the truth of this when something reminds you of a past hurt and you find you need in your heart to forgive again the person who hurt you. What was this like for you? How has a capacity to have a forgiving heart helped you?
2. Sometimes we need to forgive ourselves for things we regret about past behaviour. What happens to you when you cannot do this? How has your ability to forgive yourself for past mistakes influenced your attitude towards yourself now?
3. Pope Francis chose as his motto "miserando atque eligendo" (seen with compassion and chosen) to express his belief that Jesus viewed his past mistakes with compassion, and called him nonetheless. At this moment can you see Jesus calling you, no matter what your past has been like?
4. Are there people whose ability to forgive has inspired you? Recall them and the forgiveness they showed and give thanks for their example.

JOHN BYRNE OSA - Intercom

We continue to read about the virtues that are essential for the Christian community, and today's parable deals with forgiveness. Peter is told to forgive seventy times seven, a number that represent infinity, that is, endless forgiveness. God's grace and mercy is abundant, and we are called to extend that grace and mercy to others. The vision which is unfolding in Matthew's Gospel emphasises restoring relationship and wholeness within the community and this usually involves a change in perspective.

TRÍONA DOHERTY & JANE MELLETT - Go Deeper