**24th Sunday in Ordinary Time**



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

***Our desire for revenge can block us from receiving God’s mercy***

Anger and wrath, these also are abominations, yet a sinner holds on to them.

The vengeful will face the Lord’s vengeance,for he keeps a strict account of their sins. Forgive your neighbour the wrong he has done,and then your sins will be pardoned when you pray. Does anyone harbour anger against another and expect healing from the Lord? If one has no mercy toward another like himself, can he then seek pardon for his own sins? If a mere mortal harbours wrath,who will make an atoning sacrifice for his sins? Remember the end of your life, and set enmity aside;remember corruption and death, and be true to the commandments. Remember the commandments, and do not be angry with your neighbour;remember the covenant of the Most High, and overlook faults.

**Responsorial: Psalm 102:1-4, 9-12**

 **Response: *The Lord is kind and merciful; slow to anger and rich in compassion.***

My soul, give thanks to the Lord,
all my being, bless his holy name.
My soul, give thanks to the Lord
and never forget all his blessings. ***Resp:***

It is he who forgives all your guilt,
who heals every one of your ills,
who redeems your life from the grave,
who crowns you with love and compassion. ***Resp:***

His wrath will come to an end;
he will not be angry for ever.
He does not treat us according to our sins
nor repay us according to our faults. ***Resp:***

For as the heavens are high above the earth
so strong is his love for those who fear him.
As far as the east is from the west
so far does he remove our sins. ***Resp:***

**2nd Reading: Romans 14:7-9**

***As we belong to Christ, we live to the Lord***

We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

**Gospel Acclamation:**

 **Alleluia. Alleluia!**

 I give you a new commandment:

 love one another as I have loved you.

 **Alleluia!**

 **Gospel: Matthew 18:21-35**

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***The spirit of the unforgiving debtor rebounds on himself***

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

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

**REFLECTIONS:**



**Forgiveness is the key of LOVE**

Hatred and resentment are moral cancers that eat away at our enthusiasm to do good. An appeal to strict justice is not enough to solve the dilemma, since taking out another’s eye does not really cure the loss of one’s own eye, and revenge cannot really settle the account of a grievance. But forgiveness is a hard virtue to gain and to maintain. We can feel the problem in the question Peter asks of Jesus today: “How many times must I forgive?” And although his proposal of “seven times” is used as a round symbolic willingness to forgive “as much as it is humanly possible to forgive,” Jesus suggest we must go further still, since God forgives “seventy seven times” (or seventy times seven times.) Forgiveness is not a question of just how often or how many times, rather it reflects God’s unending willingness to pardon. There are no limits to his forgiveness.

It is so easy to forget God’s goodness, as our first reading illustrates today. (Eccl 27:30-28:7) Even the stark reality of our own death does not keep each of us alert to God’s gracious promise of salvation as the guiding principal of our actions. It is not easy to see the goodness of God in the hurt we inflict on each other in our selfish interactions. Paul tells us today that we do influence each other. We affect each other. But is it for the good (Rom 14:7-9.)

Our parable today shows that we are incapable of forgiving without first appreciating the forgiveness we have received from God. Notice the three scenes:

(1) We are insolvent, indebted, overdrawn in our account with God’s goodness. God has given us freely life, freedom, integrity and hope. We are incapable of achieving anything by our own resources- we have none! “Without me you can do nothing.”

(2) We are puffed-up with our own importance: “Pay me what you owe me!” We can be intolerant, demanding, inexcusable and arrogant. We can be unkind and unforgiving. We can injure our neighbour, and he can hurt us. We can elbow our way roughly through life. We can so easily hold a grudge, and refuse to forgive.

(3) The ultimate reality “God’s goodness” is never simple-minded. God is not blind. The unforgiving cannot be forgiven. Forgiveness only comes from realising that we have been forgiven. In pardoning we are pardoned. Our tenuous hold on others must quickly be consumed not by following our hatred to the hilt, but by pardoning in gentle forgiveness. Only so can we realise the equation: Insolvency cannot make demands!

Let by-gones be by-gones. “Forgive and forget”, we are told.

And so let us forgive from our hearts, for if we leave the court with our own suit dismissed, and fail to forgive, then we find ourselves immediately re-arranged and in the dock as the guilty accused!

By failing to forgive, we hurt ourselves more than anyone else. Surely this is what Jesus had in mind when he told how the merciless servant was cast into prison when he refused to forgive his fellow servant. I don’t think he was suggesting that God would cancel his mercy. He is simply saying that an unforgiving spirit creates a prison of its own. It builds up walls of bitterness and resentment and there is no escape until we come to forgive.

Also we must learn to forgive ourselves. Imagine you are responsible for something very serious. You are driving a car with drink. There is an accident and a young person is killed. That life cannot be brought back. There is a something in the background and that thing happens in life: a broken marriage, a pregnancy outside marriage, a broken relationship, a serious mistake etc… And for many of us we do not believe that there is another chance much less a seven times seventy chances. This is not the teaching of Jesus. God does not just give us another chance, but every time we close a door he opens another one for us.

The Lord challenges us not to make serious damaging mistakes, but he also tells us that our mistakes are not forever–they are not even for a life time–and that time and grace wash clean, that nothing is irrevocable.





