

## Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Lectionary: 130

### Reading 1 - [SIR 27:30—28:7](#)

Wrath and anger are hateful things, yet the sinner hugs them tight. The vengeful will suffer the LORD's vengeance, for he remembers their sins in detail. Forgive your neighbor's injustice; then when you pray, your own sins will be forgiven. Could anyone nourish anger against another and expect healing from the LORD? Could anyone refuse mercy to another like himself, can he seek pardon for his own sins? If one who is but flesh cherishes wrath, who will forgive his sins? Remember your last days, set enmity aside; remember death and decay, and cease from sin! Think of the commandments, hate not your neighbor; remember the Most High's covenant, and overlook faults.

### Responsorial Psalm - [PS 103:1-2, 3-4, 9-10, 11-12](#)

**R. (8) The Lord is kind and merciful, slow to anger, and rich in compassion.**

### Reading 2 - [ROM 14:7-9](#)

Brothers and sisters: None of us lives for oneself, and no one dies for oneself. For if we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord; so then, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For this is why Christ died and came to life, that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

### Gospel - [MT 18:21-35](#)

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. 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."

Today's gospel follows directly after the gospel of last Sunday, which spoke about the need for reconciliation and we spent some time reflecting on 'the how' of reconciliation. This week the conversation between Peter and Jesus could be described as a commentary on the fifth beatitude "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy", which you'll remember is in Chapter 5 of St. Matthew's Gospel.

Blessed are the merciful. Most of us don't have a problem with mercy in general or in principle. In fact, we're pretty happy when we receive mercy. What we do have problems with, are, boundless mercy, unwarranted mercy and freely given mercy... when comes to us being merciful to others. Such is who we are, because we're human with a lot of emotional baggage from our sins, the sins of others and the broken human condition due to original sin! On top of those issues, God is asking us to be merciful, forgiving, loving... to others... just as God is all those things to us.

Peter asks the question that anyone of us would likely ask in the same situation, and Jesus is happy to make it crystal clear that we must always be ready and willing to forgive, "*I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven*". And, not only that, but "unless each of you forgives your brother from your heart" we're not going to be receiving much of God's mercy ourselves! If this whole thing doesn't bring to mind the Lord's Prayer, well, it should! I think there might be a lot of us who don't really like to pray that prayer because we know we have a lot of forgiveness issues. Forgive us our debts, Lord, as we forgive our debtors.

It is not without good reason that we begin the Church's most solemn liturgies with an acknowledgement of our sinfulness. If we refuse to forgive someone, it will 'eat into us' and will rob us of that peace which Christ intended to become rooted in us and of which he reminds us at every Mass: *Peace I leave you, my own peace I give you.....* We cannot experience God's peace if we're holding anger or hurt within us. We have to let go of it. When Mass is ended, we are reminded again of what we ought to have received if we ourselves have been merciful, that we should go in that peace and by our lives glorify God.

Mercy begins with God. Forgiveness begins with God. Because He first loved us. In fact, this parable reminds us of just how connected we are, whether we like it or believe it. Whether we are disciples of Christ or people without faith. For the followers of Christ, he wants us to know that the unbounded mercy of the Father for us is not an act with consequences for me alone. Having had the price of our sins paid by Christ on the Cross and having received God's forgiveness which leads to reconciliation, this has implications for everyone in our lives. You might say it's the ultimate kind of trickle-down effects of the economy of forgiveness. In both positive and negative ways.

The only people who are going to be able to embrace the way of Christ in community, and to extend mercy and grace in the imitation of Christ, are those who know that mercy and grace has been extended to them. A person who is fully secure in the knowledge of being totally loved by God and of their own loveliness is not going to find forgiveness and reconciliation too difficult. Forgiving 77 times will not only seem not idealistic but simply the only reasonable thing to do.

Recalling what we heard last week, those who have sinned against us must be engaged by us, with mercy and the willingness to forgive. Just as God also engages the sinner for repentance and conversion and makes available sacramental grace to go and sin no more, through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Now, some of you may be thinking that it's just too much to ask you to keep forgiving and forgiving and forgiving someone who is never really sorry and never really changes. On the one hand, we have to be careful making that judgement. I mean, think about yourself and God. How quickly are you changing? How authentic are you in your repentance? If we're sincere, God will work with us. So too, should we be willing to go the distance with others. At the same time forgiveness and reconciliation does not mean indefinite tolerance of evil and unjust behavior.

There's no limit to mercy, for the repentant person. But neither God nor we can condone continued behavior that is a source of real evil and suffering that demonstrates an authentic refusal of conversion. There can be no true reconciliation with the sinner who chooses to stay in sin, nor can the Christian community fully incorporate a member who refuses reconciliation and healing of behavior that offends against truth and love.

Forgiveness must be infinitely available but only where a mutual healing of wounds is sought, only where there is a desire to have that change of mind and behavior which puts an end to the sinful way. This is why, the effectiveness of the absolution offered in confession and therefore the grace to be received, is dependent upon the penitent's actual contrition and has a firm intention of changing that behavior.

Forgiveness is a choice and it's not always an easy choice.

Love is a choice, and that's not always easy either.

God never said, we were on our own though. God promised to make this life in Christ, doable. How do you get from being like the guy in the first reading who tightly hugs their anger and hate, to be the person who lets it go and becomes free to love with mercy? Grace. Receive it. Let God heal and transform you. Let God build on your better nature and you'll be amazed at how much more peace filled you remain. You'll become surprisingly patient, uncharacteristically kind at difficult times. You'll stop desiring worldly approval and stop needing to crush others in order to love your self. You'll be amazed how so many things no longer irate you, and you won't resent others because now you really are giving up being selfish and becoming someone with great interior strength from rejoicing in truth and virtue. Your endurance will be endless, your hope will be inexhaustible, your faith will move mountains, and you'll become a refuge for others as you help them bear their burdens. This is the kind of love that has no end, no limit, no expiry date. This is how we change the world.