

Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year A

[Sirach 27:30-28:7; Romans 14:7-9; Matthew 18:21-35]

Excerpts from Pope Francis - Angelus – 17 September 2023

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Brothers & sisters, as you probably guessed, this Sunday's Gospel offers us a lesson on forgiveness. The first question you might ask is why does Peter ask Jesus: "Lord, how often should I forgive my brother or sister if they sin against me? As many as seven times?" (v. 21). First of all, the number seven, in the Bible, is a number that indicates completeness, and so Peter is very generous in the assumptions of his question. But Jesus goes further and answers him: "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times" (v. 22). He tells him that when one forgives, one does not calculate; that it is good to forgive everything, and always! Just as God does with us, and as those who administer God's justice are required to do: *forgive always*.

As priests hear confessions, he always forgives, as God forgives. Jesus then illustrates this reality through a parable, which again has to do with numbers. A king, after being implored, forgives a servant the debt of 10,000 talents. It is an excessive, immense value, ranging from 200 to 500 tons of silver: excessive. It was an impossible debt to settle, even by working a lifetime: yet this master, forgives it out of sheer "compassion" (v. 27).

This is God's heart: he always forgives, because God is compassionate. Let us not forget how God is: he is close, compassionate and caring. This is God's way of being. However, this servant, whose debt has been forgiven, shows **no mercy** towards a fellow servant who owes him 100 denarii. This too is a substantial sum, equivalent to about three months' wages — as if to say that forgiving each other costs a lot! — but not at all comparable to the previous figure that the master had forgiven.

Jesus' message is clear: God forgives without calculation, exceeding all measure. This is how he is; He acts out of love, and gratuitously. God is not bought, God is free, he is completely free. We cannot repay him, but when we forgive a brother or a sister, we imitate him. Forgiving is not, therefore, a good deed that we can **choose to do or not do**; forgiving is a fundamental condition for those who are Christians.

Every one of us, in fact, is "forgiven": let us not forget this, we are forgiven, God gave his life for us, and in no way can we repay him for his mercy, which he never withdraws from his heart. However, in keeping with the fact that it is free, that is, by forgiving one another, we can bear witness to him, sowing new life around us. For outside of forgiveness there is **no hope**; outside of forgiveness there is **no peace**. Forgiveness is the oxygen that purifies the air of hatred. Forgiveness is the **antidote** to the poisons of resentment; it is the way to defuse anger and heal so many illnesses of the heart that contaminate society.

Let us ask ourselves, then: do I believe I have received from God the gift of immense forgiveness?

Do I feel the joy of knowing that he is always ready to forgive me when I fall, even when others do not, even when I am not even able to forgive myself?

God forgives: do I believe that he forgives? And then: can I in turn forgive those who wrong me?

In this respect, we all had a person who has hurt us. Ask the Lord for the strength to forgive them.

Let us forgive them out of love for the Lord: this will restore peace to our hearts.

May this Eucharist help us to accept the grace of God and to forgive each other.