

Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time



“LORD, IF MY BROTHER SINS AGAINST ME,
HOW OFTEN MUST I FORGIVE?
AS MANY AS SEVEN TIMES?”

“I SAY TO YOU, NOT SEVEN TIMES
BUT SEVENTY-SEVEN TIMES.

Reading 1 Sirach 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 par-
don 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 Psalm 103:1-2, 3-4, 9-10, 11-12

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

Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all my being, bless his holy name.

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. **R.**

He pardons all your iniquities, heals all your ills.

He redeems your life from destruction, crowns you with kindness and compassion. **R**

He will not always chide, nor does he keep his wrath forever.

Not according to our sins does he deal with us,
nor does he requite us according to our crimes. **R.**

For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so surpassing is his kindness toward those who fear him.

As far as the east is from the west,
so far has he put our transgressions from us. **R**

Reading 2 Romans 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 Matthew 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.



DEFENSE OF FORGIVENESS

Almost always when I've written about forgiveness, I've received letters, generally anonymous, in which I'm accused of forgetting the suffering of the victims of terrorism, of not understanding the humiliation of one who has been betrayed by their spouse, of not «having my feet on the ground» and things like that.

It's not hard for me to understand this resistance to forgiveness. How am I not going to sense the anger, powerlessness and grief of one who's been a victim of violence, disdain or betrayal? But precisely the resentment and aggressivity that is indicated beneath those lines make me see with greater clarity what would a world be like in which forgiveness was bypassed.

There's a defense mechanism that's well known by psychologists. In virtue of a «mysterious mimicry», someone who has been a victim of aggression tries on their part to imitate somehow their aggressor. It involves an almost instinctive reaction that is unleashed unconsciously in the individual or collective and it can even get transmitted from generation to generation.

If at some moment you don't produce a reaction of contrary movement, the evil tends to keep going. When the victim doesn't want to or can't forgive, there remains in them a «wound that's badly healed» that causes them damage, since it chains them negatively to the past. In the same way, resentment that's entrenched in a society makes it more difficult to have clarity in paths of living together and can block every effort to find a solution to the conflicts.

The desire for revenge is undoubtedly the most instinctive response to the offense. The person needs to defend themselves from the wound received, but as warns the well-known expert Jacques Pohier, whoever tries to heal their wound by inflicting suffering on the aggressor, makes a mistake. The suffering doesn't possess a magic power to heal the humiliation or the aggression they received. It can produce a brief satisfaction, but the person needs something more to return to live in a healthy way. Henri Lacordaire said it a while back: «Do you want to be happy for a moment? Get even. Do you want to be happy forever? Forgive».

Sometimes we forget that the process of forgiveness does more good for the one offended, since it frees them from evil, makes their dignity and nobility grow, gives them energy to recreate their life, allows them to begin new projects. When Jesus invites us to forgive «seventy times seven», he's inviting us to follow the more healthy and effective path to eradicate evil from our life. His words acquire a depth all the greater for one who believes in God as the final source of forgiveness: «Forgive and you will be forgiven».

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