

## **Twenty Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time A2017**

The readings of this Sunday talk about the importance of forgiveness. They show that forgiveness is at the heart of Christian faith. They invite us to forgive one another as God has forgiven us in his Son Jesus Christ.

The first reading describes the advice of Sirach to his compatriots about the negative feelings and the hateful things. It shows that anyone who dwells in negative feelings and hatred, God cannot listen to his prayer or forgive him his sins. It invites us to think of our last days and the retribution that follows death, and to repent of our sins.

What is behind this text is the idea that hatred and retaliatory feelings never engender justice, but rather vengeance. There is also the truth that forgiveness frees our heart and makes us resemble God. The last idea is related to the truth that forgiveness is the source of God's blessing for those who practice it.

This text allows us to understand the point of today's Gospel in which Jesus speaks of the importance of forgiveness through the parable of the two debtors. First of all, the Gospel starts with the question of Peter to Jesus, if he could forgive someone who has sinned against him up to seven times. Then, it talks about the answer of Jesus who invites him to forgive seventy-seven times.

After that the Gospel speaks of the parable of two men who were indebted to their master. It relates, in the first instance, how the first debtor begged his master to be patient with him until he pays back and how his master forgave him his entire debt. In the second instance, the Gospel describes the cruelty of the second debtor who refused to forgive his fellow debtor as he was forgiven by his master.

Finally, the Gospel relates the reaction of the master to the cruel conduct of the second debtor toward his fellow. The Gospel ends with Jesus saying that if you do not forgive your brothers from your heart, God will treat you likewise.

What do we learn from today's Gospel? Today I want to talk about forgiveness. Let me start with an anecdote. In fact, one day in a Nursing Home, after I preached on this Gospel, a lady came to me crying. When I wanted to know why, she told me that she still has unfinished business about forgiveness.

I do not want to enter into details about this story. But, I think that, like that lady, many of us still have unfinished business over forgiveness. Peter who was certainly touched by the teaching of Jesus wants to know if forgiving seven times was enough and an expression of spiritual patience with the offender.

Jesus responds that he should forgive seventy-seven times. In fact, if we remain in the field of mathematics, we realize that seventy-seven times equals four hundred ninety. Humanly speaking it is impossible to keep an open book in which we regularly write down the names of the persons and the bad things they do to us so that we come to the number four hundred ninety.

If we understand all that, it becomes clear that the point of Jesus with this parable is to teach us that we have to forgive indefinitely and without counting. On this regard, the question arises: why shall we forgive unlimitedly?

Three main reasons push us to do so. First, we forgive one another, because as human beings we are all sinners and in need of God's mercy. What makes a difference between us is probably the degree of sinning or the type of sin in which we are involved, but not the reality of sin itself. If that is true, then, we have to open up to the possibility of forgiving one another as an explicit recognition that we are all sinners.

Second, we have to forgive one another, because God himself continually forgives us our own sins. We have to remember that if it were not because of God's mercy, we would not have survived. We are so inclined to sin that we easily forget our commitment and the promise we make to God. Psalm 130 reminds us that if the Lord could keep record of our sins, nobody would survive. For that reason, we have to be appreciative of God's mercy and imitate him when we have problems with our brothers and sisters.

Moreover, because of God's mercy toward us, it would be unwise to start calculating the damage done to us by others. This is exactly what the second debtor has done. He forgot that he was forgiven and, therefore, he had in turn to forgive. Instead, he became mean with his colleague. How can God be merciful toward us if we do not show the same mercy to others? Remember what we say in the prayer of Our Father: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

Third, we have to forgive one another because of the example of Christ himself, who, on the cross forgave his murderers. In fact, Christ is our model of life in everything. We cannot pretend to be his disciples and not imitate his example of life when it comes to forgiveness.

Is Christ's forgiveness a utopia? Not at all. Some people have tried to put this message into practice and they have succeeded. Think how Nelson Mandela led the process of Reconciliation in South Africa after the apartheid period. Beyond hurts and rancor, he led the black community to healing through forgiveness and reconciliation.

That is why as difficult as forgiveness might be, if we put in our heart and our will, it can be achieved. Here we have to take seriously the word of Jesus when he invites us to come to him and learn from him (Mt 11: 28-29), because forgiveness is above all a school of life.

Forgiveness does not mean that faults or hurts do not matter. Rather, it means that in spite of the harms and the pains we bear for what happened, we willingly choose to put everything behind us in order to give a chance to peace and the possibility of living together.

Let us pray then that Christ fill us with the grace of his Holy Spirit so that we come to forgive one another and especially those who have harmed us as he forgave our sins on the cross. May God bless you all!

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

Homily Date: September 17, 2017

© 2017 – Fr Felicien I. Mbala, PhD, STD

Contact: [www.mbala.org](http://www.mbala.org)

Document Name: 20170917homily.pdf