

Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2020

Let me start the homily with the Second reading of the day, the letter of St Paul to the Romans. But, before doing it, I believe that an example of life can help us understand it better. A married man or woman cannot behave in the same way as he or she did before marriage. Marriage has brought a change in his or her life. They belong to each other. None of them lives for himself or herself.

St Paul says something similar in the 2nd reading of today. Christians are not their own masters; they belong to Christ. They do not live for themselves, but for the Lord. But, as Christ died and arose for our sake, in both life and death, Christians are just people who belong to Jesus.

The consequence to draw from such reasoning is very simple. If it is true that, as Christians, we belong to Jesus, it means that in our relationships with one another, we cannot be simply led by human criteria. We have to act according to the example of Jesus who gave up his life on the cross for us.

In other words, by his life and death on the cross, Jesus has brought us forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with his Father and between us. He has died for our sake so that the abundant mercy of his Father might come upon us. Moreover, it was when we were in a state of sin that God reached out to us through his son Jesus and offered his forgiveness.

Because God has forgiveness, we too have to forgive one another. That is the message Jesus brings in today's Gospel. For Jesus, our forgiveness must be without limit. This is what he means by telling Peter that he must forgive not seven times, but seventy seven times.

In other words, Jesus does not want us to stop and calculate the amount of the damage or wounds inflicted us. Because his Father is a God of infinite mercy, human beings have to imitate him. By asking Peter to forgive seventy seven times, Jesus wants to show us the immense distance between the heart of his Father who forgives indefinitely and the human heart that wants always to calculate the blows received in life.

For Jesus, there is no sin that his Father will not forgive; no guilt will be greater than his love. His inexhaustible goodness is in contrast to the meanness of human heart that is incapable of forgiving even the smallest offenses. This is what the parable teaches us in the example of the two debtors. As, Christians, sons of God, we must forgive the offenses with a heart similar to that of our Father who is in heaven; we must show a love without limit. Let us remember the prayer of our Father:

"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us". Those are some of most healing words in Scripture. Look at what we have received from the Lord, from the good of our families and our children to the spiritual gift of living eternally in God's love. The pain received from others is minor in comparison to the gifts God has given us. We cannot let this pain destroy our ability to receive God's gift. This is what the unmerciful servant did.

In fact, the unmerciful servant ruined a golden opportunity. He could have become a person of kindness and gentleness, reflecting a small portion of the forgiveness he has received. Instead, he held onto his past, his anger at the money still unpaid, and his refusal to forgive destroyed him.

But what does God's forgiveness mean? To forgive does not mean to let things stand as they are. God is not covering up all the evil done by human beings, does not close any eye

and pretend not to see. God manifests his mercy when he transforms people and leads them to conversion, when he changes them and turns them from selfish individuals to truly loving persons.

Forgiveness does not imply that a fault or sin does not matter. Nor does it mean that the offense is forgotten, for that is often impossible. Rather, it means freely choosing to overlook an offense because one is free to do so, having loved and forgiven oneself.

For us too, to forgive should mean to open our hearts to welcome our brothers and sisters despite the pain, to set the conditions so that they can begin reconstructing their lives. It means also to search for every possible way of setting peace. We must never cut off all links and cannot even expect that the first approach of reconciliation should come from one who has offended. Even if it looks stupid to human eyes, we must be the ones to make the first move towards our brothers and sisters.

But, why is forgiveness so important? According to the first reading, when we give free vent to our vindictive retaliatory instincts, to our rage and grudges, we do not get any justice, we simply make things worse. It is necessary to go beyond simple justice, and one must open one's heart to sentiment of mercy. The forgiveness of an offense done to us is an indispensable condition to pray and obtain pardon from God: *If one who is but flesh cherishes wrath, who will forgive his sins?*

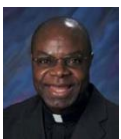
Second. Forgiveness is a matter of life or death, of peace or bitterness. The words of Sirach are so clear : *"wrath and anger are hateful things."* The unforgiving person is self-consumed by wrath and anger and the other hateful things. The failure to forgive brings much pain and scores of inhuman reactions. Not to forgive is like not breathing; it is unnatural and inhuman. Forgiveness towards others then enables us to be in control of ourselves just as the inability to forgive delivers us over to a bitter slavery of wrath, anger and mistrust.

Another motive for forgiving is our very precarious condition as human beings. *"Remember your last days; Remember death and decay..."* This statement puts the question bluntly before us: do we want to die with bitter and hateful memories or do we want to be delivered?

Let me now conclude. We hurt others and others hurt us. What shall we do? The only solution is forgiveness. How wonderful life would be if more people could say: I am sorry. A wonderful sense of peace comes over us as we forgive. Forgiveness drains poison, heals the wound, brings us peace.

Forgiveness creates new hearts and minds. How not to take this opportunity to make peace with yourself and the people around you? Today we pray for the grace of treating others as we have been treated by the Lord. We pray for the ability to forgive and move on with life, just as we thank the Lord for the innumerable times he has forgiven us and has himself moved on with sharing his life with. God bless you all!

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



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