

Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time – September 13, 2020 – Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture Reading: 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 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.

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.**

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.

He pardons all your iniquities,
heals all your ills.
redeems your life from destruction,
he crowns you with kindness and compassion.

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.

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.

Scripture Reading: 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."



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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

This Sunday is all about forgiveness. The Gospel illustrates in stark terms what this word means. First, look at the initial readings, which are preliminaries. The First Reading, from the Book of Sirach, tells how awful wrath and anger are, but how the sinner “hugs them tight,” a wonderful image. Release them, it commands us, and let them go. The Psalm speaks beautifully about God’s absolving love: God is kind and merciful, slow to anger and rich in compassion. The Second Reading says we ought to live not for ourselves but for others. We should imitate God, not one of us living for our own self, but living for the Lord. And if we die, we would die for the Lord. Forgiveness is a major ingredient of imitating God in this way. People do not always do right, and we need to forgive them. This is the gift and the goal.

Our culture has some pretty diverse understandings of what forgiveness means. For some it is a condescending act performed only by one person who is higher than another—a King or Queen or judge, who leans down to grant pardon. Or a boss, or a media star. For others it means “I can forgive but I can never forget.” Perhaps this means, I will remain angry forever but will never act upon it. Such a stance includes an uncomfortable attitude: “I will choke back my hurt and anger by a sheer act of the will. I may have been attacked by someone, but I will suppress my reaction.” Maybe these are parts of the road to true forgiveness, but there is much more. On Easter Sunday of 1960, the great seer of truth and lover of God, Dag Hammarskjöld, wrote an interpretation that moved me greatly: “Forgiveness breaks the chain of causality because he who ‘forgives’ you—out of love—takes upon himself the consequences of what you have done. Forgiveness, therefore, always entails a sacrifice”. In other words, there is a price you must pay for your own liberation. Since that liberation has come through another’s sacrifice, you in turn must be willing to liberate in the same way, in spite of the consequences to yourself. You absorb these, out of love.

Let us apply these insights to the Gospel. The story is an involved one. It involves a servant who is pardoned by the master but then goes out and refuses vigorously to forgive his fellow servants. At about six lines from the end of our reading, the owner of the Vineyard says, “Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant, as I had pity on you?” Underneath this is the point we concluded to above. The real motivation for forgiveness is gratitude based on love. If someone has had pity on me out of love, then my authentic reaction will be deep appreciation. I will want to pass the gift on, especially if it is God who has forgiven me, I will want to pass on to someone else the liberation I have received, especially if that person has hurt me. So can we halt the chain of causality and pass along love instead of hate? As you and I receive Christ’s presence this Sunday in the Eucharist, let us sense his forgiving love signified so deeply in this sacrament. Let us allow our gratitude to flow in the same way toward others.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. Is it harder for you to forgive someone or to ask for forgiveness? How good are you at overlooking the faults of others as Sirach suggests? Do you forgive yourself?
2. “For if we live, we live for the Lord.” Sometimes God asks people to do extraordinary things. But most of the time not. How do you live your ordinary life for the Lord? Can you find God in the ordinary moments? If you did that regularly, would your life be extraordinary?
3. Do you think God wants you to forgive your neighbor just for your neighbor's sake or for yours too? How did Jesus “take away the sins of the world?”

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another’s openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

Look upon us, O God, Creator and ruler of all things, and, that we may feel the working of your mercy, grant that we may serve you with all our heart. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

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Prayer to St. Michael

St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle. Be our defense against the wickedness and snares of the Devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray, and do thou, O Prince of the heavenly hosts, by the power of God, thrust into hell Satan, and all the evil spirits, who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen