

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I imagine that most of us at one time or another have looked to someone as a mentor or a model in our lives. For many of us, it was our parents, for some it was perhaps a teacher, a movie star or a sports figure – we wanted to be just like them.

Suddenly there comes a day when we recognize that there is something that we do not like about them, we begin seeing their faults and flaws. When that happens, they lose that place of honor we placed them in.

It can even progress to open hatred and anger toward that person – in short, the relationship has broken down and we have turned our backs on them. They are no longer part of our community – we no longer see them as persons but only as strangers and individuals.

In the past few weeks, we have seen open attacks on our nation's story and the persons that are part of that story because they are not perfect, forgetting that we are not perfect ourselves.

Yes, we have made mistakes, taken advantage of others for our own sake – these are lessons for us and future generations to learn and reflect on – so hopefully the mistakes and wrongs will not be repeated because of simple ignorance.

In today's Gospel, it is easy to see that the King has been kind and merciful, slow to anger and rich in compassion toward the debtor before him. In ancient times, being a debtor and unable to repay was a truly frightful position to be in.

Debtor's prison was not like today's prisons – they were dark, cold places of torture, for it was assumed that you were hiding your wealth. The guards tortured you so you would give up the location of where you hid your money so the debt could be repaid.

If you there was no money that was hidden, then all your belongings, land, and even your family, along with yourself could be sold into slavery.

Can you imagine today being tossed in jail for falling behind on your mortgage or car payment? Could you imagine that you, your wife and children become slaves because you could not repay a loan or the light bill.

Yet that is what this debtor faced. I know that I would throw myself upon the King's mercy, if not for my sake, at least for the sake of my family.

This King not only pardons this debtor's failure to repay the debt, he abolishes the debt itself. The King has set an example to be followed.

This should remind us of the Last Supper and the washing of the feet. Jesus told the apostles:

“If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet.

Deacon Gordon Lee

I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.

A young man secretly embezzled several hundred dollars from the business where he was employed. When the shortage was discovered, the senior partner called the young man into his office.

The young man knew he would be fired and sent to prison.

The senior partner asked the worried young man if he was guilty. He replied that he was.

Surprisingly, the executive asked him: “If I keep you in your present capacity, can I trust you in the future?” “Yes sir, you surely you can. I have learned my lesson,” replied the astonished employee.

The boss must have detected the repentant man’s sincerity because he said: “I am not going to press charges and you can continue in your present responsibility.”

Then he added, “I think you ought to know that you are the second man in this firm who succumbed to temptation but was shown leniency. I was the first. What you have done, I did. The mercy you are receiving, I received. It is only the grace of God that can keep us both,” – Isn’t it true that those who love the best are those who know best that they are loved?

Those who forgive the best are those who know best that they are forgiven. Our best efforts only reflect the deep, deep love of God for us.

This unforgiving servant in the parable today has failed to follow the model the King has set before him – which we all too often in our own lives. We profess to follow Jesus here in the Mass and once out of sight of the church, live as the rest of the world does. We allow hatred, greed, lust, and earthly possessions to dominate us, to make us like this unforgiving servant – we want our pound of flesh, we want our revenge.

Our King, Jesus Christ calls us to follow him, not just in words but in our actions too. Yes, we are sinners and we will stumble and fall – but if we are faithful sinners who lovingly embrace Jesus’ way of life, we should never doubt that Christ will offer us kindness, mercy and compassion, if we are truly sincere and repentant for what we have done.

We have been created in God’s image and likeness; but we defile that image and likeness by sin: however, we can restore that image and likeness by imitating Jesus’ virtues. The more you conform yourself to Jesus by following his example, the closer you will be to Jesus in heaven and the more the glory you will share with him.

As St Paul in Galatians said: “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

When we say “Emanuel” – God is with us – we mean that he is really part of us, both physically and spiritually.

When we say “God take the wheel” – we become the Kings and Queens who know “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. for we have internalized what makes God good all the time.”

This past Tuesday was the Nativity of the Virgin Mary – we celebrated her birthday. It is her “Yes” to God that the “Way” to redemption and salvation is opened to all men.

Like Mary, her “Yes” is the “Yes” each of us is called to. She not only physically carries our Lord during her pregnancy, she spiritually carries him in her heart throughout the rest of her earthly life and eternity.

Those of you who are mothers know that you have a special connection to each of your children that does not end with delivering a child. It is a connection that will exist for the rest of your lives and into eternity.

Women are truly a step ahead of us men because of that connection. Men must work to bond with their children, just as they must work to bond with their wife, Christ and the Church.

Each man, just like Peter, Andrew, James and John, must also say “Yes” to Jesus and allow the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts, minds, bodies and souls today and for Eternity. Otherwise, we risk becoming that unfaithful servant, refusing the hope, faith and love that Jesus Christ has for us and modeled himself for us on the Cross to imitate – to love one another as he has loved us.

Amen!