

September 12, 2020

Sir 27:30-28:7; Rom 14:7-9; Mt 18:21-35

Why do we find it so hard to forgive? Sometimes we can hold on to resentment and anger - and maybe we want to let it go - but we don't. We often keep lists of those who've wronged us, we treat differently those who hurt us, we avoid and shun those who we have something against (or who are from a different group). But we heard the Lord speak today through the prophet Sirach: *Wrath and anger are hateful things, yet the sinner hugs them tight. ... Remember your last days, set enmity aside.* God does not tell us to do anything that is not aimed at our best good - and God is very insistent on us offering forgiveness to others.

Why do we hold on to anger towards another? What good does it do? Maybe we think we are owed something. That this person has to give us something, or suffer something, to earn our forgiveness. We think that by holding a grudge, being angry, treating another with disrespect we somehow hurt them and extract the price for forgiveness. However, there are a couple problems with this. First, hate begets hate. We only increase the stress of the problem between us, and it is a clear violation of God's command of love. Secondly, for many hurts there is nothing that will ever actually settle the account. For example, if you are angry with someone who has killed a person you love, our society (and many movies we love to watch) tell us that you'll only feel better when they are dead - and maybe if you kill them yourselves the pain of the loss will go away. But this actually doesn't restore what was lost. So some say, "yes, but I will feel better." Take it from someone who has spoken to people who have killed a rival in anger - it doesn't really end anything. Somewhere inside we don't know what the price we need to get is, or it is too huge to calculate, so we can be left saying: "I will never forgive them," because the price can't ever be met.

This is one of the points of the Gospel today. We see the servant who has been forgiven by the master being unwilling to forgive a fellow servant. He has his price (the amount he is owed by the fellow servant), and in his anger he has the man thrown in prison until he pays. He gets his revenge, but not the money - can't make money to pay someone back when your in prison. Who wins in that one? - no one! But let's look at what happened earlier in the story. This servant who would not forgive had just had a debit written off. The master in all justice could have done as he proposed and taken everything from the man, and condemned him - this was his right. Instead, he took a different route and forgave the debit. Now they both can move

forward in peace with the pain and stress of the debit gone - the master did what we all have the power to do. Set the price for forgiveness at zero dollars paid.

But Jesus is making another point in this story that we should be sensitive to. He is speaking about us appreciating the forgiveness we have received from God and following that example. The servant owed the master what we have translated as “a huge amount” yet in the original language an actual amount is given - 10,000 Talents. Now ONE talent was worth about 10-15 years pay for a worker. In other words an amount that he could not hope to repay even if he made 100 times the normal pay and gave everything to the master for hundreds of years. This is like our debit to God - it is simply unpayable. Nothing we can do, not resources we have can make up for it, so God in a great act of mercy suffers the cross to pay the debit for us. The fellow servant owed “a smaller amount” - in the original language 100 Denarii. One Denarius was a day’s pay - so this is a doable debit that was only tiny compared to what was owed the master. The first servant refused to show the mercy he was shown and decided he wasn’t even going to give him a chance to make it good - he had decided to not forgive. The master then changes his mind - and treats him just as he did his fellow servant. Which is exactly what Jesus says God will do for us - forgive us as we forgive others (listen tot he Our Father). He says earlier in this same Gospel: *For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.* It is strange that we, like the servant, will expect that we can refuse to forgive and yet be forgiven by God. Yet we do - just like the servant in the story.

With an unpayable debit to God, our only hope is God forgiving it. But as Jesus tells us, this forgiveness is not automatic, or just given upon faith - there is also a response we must make involve to others. God speaks to us through the prophet: *Could anyone nourish anger against another and expect healing from the LORD?* God goes on to counsels: *Forgive your neighbor’s injustice; then ... your own sins will be forgiven.* Jesus says to forgive from the heart - and that can be hard. But with God’s help it takes the same about of effort as deciding to be angry, or deciding what the price will be for forgiveness, or deciding to never give forgiveness.

What do we think we gain by hurting another? Made in God’s likeness we are only really satisfied by love, and we don’t achieve the reception of love through hate. To decide a price for forgiveness will leave another in pain and us empty. We think we will be satisfied if they hurt, but somehow deep down we will be dissatisfied. Following God’s example of deciding to forgive secures our own forgiveness and freedom, mends pain, and is the way to true peace.