

From the Homily Library of Fr. Callistus Iyoremer

24th Sunday Ordinary Time - Year A - September 13, 2020

God' Forgiveness of Us and Our Forgiveness of Others

Our readings today are very powerful, and they are about a subject that is a very challenging one. It is a topic in the spiritual life that many people would rather avoid. It is a subject that is at the heart of Jesus' teaching and mission. I am talking about forgiving others.

It is true to say that everyone loves to be forgiven; but forgiving others is a different story altogether. Even the saints struggled with forgiving others. We see that in our Gospel passage today. Peter is asking our Lord Jesus; Lord if my brother sins against me how many times should I forgive him? Seven times, that many times; Jesus says no not seven times but 77 times.

Notice, friends, what I want you to see today is that there is a correlation between God's forgiveness of us and our forgiveness of others; between our willingness to forgive others and our capacity to be forgiven by God.

We hear this in our first reading from the book of Sirach: *"Forgive your neighbor's injustice; then when you pray, your own sins will be forgiven."*

Then we turn to the Gospel passage; it is that wonderful story of a man who has been forgiven by his master for his many debts, yet he strangles those under him who owe him much less than he himself owed. The people listening find this terrible and off putting.

We find this correlation even at the center of The Lord's Prayer; that prayer that Jesus himself taught us. We pray every day *"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who*

trespass against us." Our responsibility to receive divine forgiveness and our invitation to be conduits of God's forgiveness of others becomes true when we pray this prayer. There is a correlation there that is not just accidental because we beg for God's forgiveness in the measure that, we become instruments of God' forgiveness to others.

Forgiveness must be quickly. I say this because sometimes people hold resentments for weeks, months, years and decades. It becomes part of them. It sinks so deep in their souls; it becomes part of the structure of their souls that it becomes almost impossible to forgive. *"The sunset must not find you still angry, do not give the devil his opportunity."* Eph. 4 :26

Spiritual Masters have proposed concrete ways by which can become better forgivers of sins:

1. Keep your own sins frequently before your mind's eyes. We want to forget our sins yet we are good at keeping other people's sins before our mind's eyes. Ask yourself today - "don't you sit down purposefully at the end of the day and remind yourself of the various ways that you have been hurt or unjustly wronged or offend by others?" We must remember that we have been forgiven far more than we have been offended.
2. Use the Confiteor at Mass. Sometimes those words *"Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy"* just simply pass our lips. Ask yourself when the priest says, "brothers and sisters, let us acknowledge our sins and so prepare ourselves to celebrate these sacred Mysteries" do you daydream or allow your mind to wander? The moment of the Confiteor is an opportunity of grace.

3. Use the Sacrament of Reconciliation. When we go to confession, we admit our sinfulness. We receive forgiveness that, in turn, helps us to be forgivers of sins.
4. Forgive through a concrete act or concrete sign. Don't let it stay in mind as a vague abstraction. Signal it with a note, a call, a visit with some concrete sign. Let people know, let yourself know, that you have offered forgiveness.