

2020 September 13

Twenty-fourth Sunday of the Ordinary Time

Readings:

First: Sirach 27.30-28.7, "Remember the end of your life, and set enmity aside." (6a)

Psalm 103, "It is the Lord who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases. (3)

Second: Romans 14.7-9, "If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord." (17b)

Gospel: Mathew 18.21-35, Forgive "not seven times, but seventy-seven times" (17b)

Forgive seventy times seven

Abraham prayed to God for forgiveness, not for himself, not even for his own people but for some foreigners living in the close by city. In that prayer he first presumes that he would find fifty just people there. Then he was afraid and slowly scales down the number finally to ten. We know the story from the book of Genesis. God could not find a single just person except Abraham's nephew, Lot, living in that city. Saving Lot's family alone God destroyed the city totally, which finally turned to be the dead sea, in which no creature can live, and it remain so even today, we believe (Genesis chapters. 18-19).

How many times we would dare to ask God for forgiveness? God agreed with Abraham that for the sake of fifty just people he would preserve the city. For those of us who happen to be sinners, can we presume that fifty times forgiveness from God would be sufficient? Definitely no! Will it be OK asking God's forgiveness seventy times seven? That is the figure Jesus gave us to forgive our brothers and sisters, and this must be so to one and all of our brothers and sisters sinning against us. Seventy times seven in biblical language is equal to infinite times.

The reality of our life situation is such that there would be no limit for us to ask for forgiveness. The teaching of Jesus today and that of Sirach, the wisdom writer, and the prayer in the psalm are the same, praying for infinite forgiveness from God in return to forgiving our brothers and sisters without any limit. If we mean that God should respond to our prayer as we pray, it is likely to be risky. We promise God that we would forgive infinitely, that is, how so many times they sin against us. One condition or factor we must keep in mind is that, as a rejoinder to our prayer to God, we must also ask for forgiveness to our brothers and sisters against whom we sin in word, deed, and thought. That rejoinder alone will make our acts of repentance and forgiveness real.

Hence before we approach God for forgiveness, we need to truly forgive from the bottom of our hearts our brothers and sisters and ask for their forgiveness. Only these acts will qualify us to stand before God asking for his forgiveness and blessing. Acts of forgiveness are the gateway to freedom, inner liberation, peace, and happiness. This is true for us, individuals, for nations, and for the world. May God save us!

Fr. George

