

A few years ago, I was in India on one of my holidays. I was at a priests' gathering and was hoping that a particular priest would not turn up at the party. The very thought of this man turning up and walking in, made me very anxious. What happened? He did turn up. When he walked into the hall, I felt very uncomfortable. It was supposed to be a happy gathering. But soon I began to feel very anxious. I could not enjoy the delicious food there, a drink, and the company. I could not enjoy anything. Instead I ended up being sick. Because every time I looked at this man, I was reminded of the deep hurt that he had cost me. I thought I had forgiven him long ago. But I had not seen him or had any close encounter with this man. And, therefore, when I encountered him in this close group, it was difficult to hide my own emotions. Eventually, I left the place, and came home. When I shared this with my spiritual director, she said – I did tell her, you know, I thought I had forgiven him – she said: “You may have conveniently forgotten, but you haven't really forgiven him from the heart, from deep down.”

I realised that day that unforgiveness can make us sick. Resentment and anger can be toxic, and this can make us sick deep down. The offender can be seen happily walking around and having a great time. So, my resentment is not helping me. It is not affecting him, but it is making me sick and feeling trapped. The impact of this kind of deep bitterness and anger can be really toxic and can really destroy our peace. We can accumulate this over a long period of time, and this can be very toxic.

Do you ever feel trapped in a dark place, but you cannot get out? I'm not talking about the curfew that we have in Melbourne these days. But a real sense of being trapped and the loss of freedom.

Well, unforgiveness can give us that.

When Peter comes to Jesus to ask this question, we have to look at this question. Peter says, Lord how many times, how often should I forgive my brother if he wrongs me? And immediately he gives an example. He says can I do it 7 times? In the Old Testament the prophet Amos says you may forgive your offender 3 times. Now Peter is going double plus one. So, Peter thinks he is in a good position when he says seven times, meaning: “I'm being very generous”.

I suppose, you know, one of those scripture scholars says: “Peter is not interested in forgiveness. Peter is interested in asking Jesus: ‘How much can I tolerate until I have the justification to take revenge. So, how much can I tolerate somebody's offence until I am justified in taking vengeance’.”

It's not about forgiveness and that's where Jesus comes up with this beautiful parable. Now, 10,000 talents, if you imagine, is like the total wages of 150,000 years. So, it's a total exaggeration. What Jesus is trying to tell us is that the master is God. The master has an immeasurable amount of grace and mercy towards us. All that the master is asking us, is to

respond with a measurable amount of mercy towards others. So, if God can forgive us 10,000 talents of our offences, which is unimaginable, immeasurable, we cannot throttle somebody's throat with 100 denarii, which is a week's wages. That's the difference. When God is so generous to us, how dare we choose not to forgive? The opposite of forgiveness is seeking revenge. The opposite of vengeance or any offence is not seeking vengeance but forgiveness.

When you are able to forgive from the heart, which is the last sentence of the Gospel today, forgiving from the heart, when we are not able to do that, we are trapped. We are trapped in a hard and rocky place. It's a place that we can never get out from, because we choose to stay there. So, the trick is, choose to forgive and let God be the vindicator. Do not have vengeance in you. Let God be the vindicator. Remember, unforgiveness and bitterness can make us sick. So, it's a choice that we can make. Do we choose to remain sick? Do we choose to remain trapped? Or, do we choose health? Do we choose to free ourselves so that we can live, love and laugh?

We are created to be free people. A people who can love and forgive. And that's why the message of Jesus, which is reflected in the second reading in a very powerful way, by St Paul who says if we live, we live for the Lord. If we die, we die with the Lord. We have a different life. We cannot be like others, who hold vengeance. We are Jesus people, aren't we? We are Jesus people who choose to forgive, even from the cross. Jesus chose to forgive, even from the pain and the shame of the cross.

I understand we are human beings. We are affected by people who have hurt us deeply. We are saying: "I am hurt but I will keep this hurt therefore I will not let go, that means I will make myself sick". Jesus is telling us: "Free yourself. You are born to be free. Leave the vengeance and the vindication to God. God will deal with them in whatever way." We don't pray that it will happen, but God will. For us, tasting God's forgiveness and God's peace is very important.

So, is there somebody in your life or some event in your life, in which you would like to seek peace, you would like to reach out in forgiveness to that person? If not for that person's sake at least for your own sake? So that you can let go. Free yourself from the trap, and then begin to breathe easy and say: "I can breathe God's peace, because God has chosen to forgive me." Have you ever realised how much God has forgiven you? I do. I know how much God has forgiven me and I have a responsibility. I need to repay. I need to somehow respond to that call of mercy and say: "Thank you Jesus, thank you God for forgiving me and help me to do the same for others". Free yourself. Breathe in the peace of Christ. And the mercy of God will be our guide, and our judge.