

Twenty-Fourth Sunday

Sirach 27: 30 - 28: 7; Romans 14: 7-9; Matthew 18: 21-35

NEVER forget. "2020 has already been a year I will never forget," said Dr. Diana Fite, president of the Texas Medical Associations. "The world and our own medical world have changed abruptly and drastically."

NEVER forget. "Our senior year was supposed to be what we thought would be the greatest high school year ever, however that took a turn when our spring break ran away with more days. While being stuck in quarantine has taught me many things, the most important one is learning to appreciate what I have and not take it for granted," said High School Senior Amy Vang. "This is definitely a year that we will never forget, especially the graduating class of 2020."

NEVER forget. "In a year when the coronavirus pandemic has reshaped countless American rituals, even the commemoration of 9/11 could not escape unchanged," says a headliner. "... We can never, ever forget the people that have been lost, and we never will." (Trump)

Never forget. Those words carry a lot of meaning and intention these days, don't they? Often those words are spoken not in regard to something bad, something painful, and something tragic, but rather in regard to something good, something righteous, something holy. Sometimes we say those words or feel them in our hearts, in regard to something good -- usually for a loved one who is no longer with us.

We want to remember our spouses and our parents and our siblings and our friends and sometimes, sadly, our children. We don't want to ever forget what they meant to us, the love they showed us, and the deep love we still have for them. We want to never, ever forget all the good times, the fun times, the meaningful times we shared. Never forget.

Sincerely in my heart, none of us want to forget those who were good to us, taught us, put up with our foolishness, sacrificed themselves for us and loved us regardless if we returned love for love or not. More so, think of God. God is the one who loves us most. If there is anyone who is shown little gratitude for all he has done, it's God.

God made a beautiful and producing world for us to live in. He gave us our existence, our abilities, our freedom. And no matter how often or how many

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times we disappoint God, he forgives us and gives us another chance. There is no way we could ever pay God back for all his kindnesses, patience, and long suffering in regard to us. There is no way we could show our gratitude to God for the many times he has sought after us - EXCEPT- except for one way. And that is the way Jesus has taught us in our gospel story today.

When Peter asked Jesus if it is sufficient to forgive someone seven times a day? To Peter's surprise he said,

"I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times."

In other words, Jesus was telling Peter there must be no limit to forgiveness.

Then he went on to tell the story of how God forgives. There was a servant who was forgiven a huge debt. After being forgiven, the servant then dealt abominably with a fellow-servant who owed him a paltry amount in comparison. He remembered not his forgiven debt, and for this he was punished until he paid back all his debt. As Jesus instructed Peter and us,

**"So will my heavenly Father do to you,
unless each of you forgives your brother from your heart."**

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ:

Like Peter, we all try to forgive without limit and want to forget without pretense. But many things are difficult to forget. We know that. And maybe God doesn't really expect that from us. But there is one thing that we seem to have no problem forgetting.

The servant in today's Gospel passage seems to have forgotten this same thing too. You see, what we often forget are things we should remember every moment of every day, things that put everything into perspective.

Allow me to be personal. Kokua, please forget not a priest is like everyone else, a sinner in need of God's mercy and forgiveness, and perhaps even a greater sinner. For I too fail to practice what I preach, and live life, holy and righteous, as we all are called to live.

When I look deep into my heart, when I take an honest assessment of my true emotions and attitudes, my unwillingness to "forgive and forget" is really not

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about any of those lofty goals.

No - when I claim to be forgiving another, yet can't stop thinking about what happened, I'm simply deluding myself, "tricking" myself into believing that I am somehow being faithful to God's command that I forgive.

The sad truth is, often when I say that I can forgive and yet never forget, what I'm really trying to hold onto is not a memory at all, but rather something much darker -- anger, resentment, bitterness, and unwillingness to "let go, and let God".

So, dear friends, the one thing God wants us to do is to allow God pour his mercy and forgiveness into our lives. God sent His Son Jesus to pay off our sins with his life and the Holy Spirit to comfort and counsel us in life. That is what we must remember if we want to truly be freed. In the words from the Book of Sirach in today's First Reading,

"Forgive ... then when you pray, your own sins will be forgiven."

May we always recognize our profound need of God's mercy, and forgiveness and more than ever before, never forget all the wonderful things God does for us, for you and me, and the world. Amen.