

ctkAlive! Scripture Study

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time 2020—A Cycle Readings



“Forgiveness”

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Note: For your convenience and to broaden your benefit from this and all sessions in this series, you will find links to books, authors, and other references mentioned in the text.

Caution: Links to the internet are like rabbits dashing across a hunter’s path. Instinct says, “Leave the reflection and chase after that link!” Instead, we suggest waiting until you have followed the entire reflection. Then take all the time you wish to follow these interesting and educational links. Exception: In the course of the lesson, you may have an opportunity to watch or listen to a relevant song or video.

Opening Prayer

(edited and abridged for use here)

Merciful Lord,

St. Paul teaches: “Let the peace that comes from Christ rule in our hearts.” ([Col. 3:15](#))

When I forgive, allow your Holy Spirit to fill my heart with peace.

I pray this peace that only comes from you will rule in my heart.

Above all, I am thankful. Not just today, not this week, but always.

Thank you for reminding me to always be grateful.

With gratitude, I draw closer to you and let go of unforgiveness.

With gratitude, I see the person who caused my pain.

Loved and accepted, help me find the compassion that comes with true forgiveness.

When I see the person who hurt me, bring this prayer back to my remembrance, so I can capture any ungodly thoughts and make them obedient to Christ ([2 Cor. 10:5](#)).

And with the confidence of Christ in my heart, guide me into the freedom of forgiveness.

I praise you for all you are doing in my life—teaching and perfecting my faith.

I pray this in your Name, Amen.

by Kristine Brown

author of [Over It. Conquering Comparison to Live Out God's Plan](#) and founder of the non-profit organization, *More Than Yourself, Inc.* Kristine writes about her God-story to help others discover their own at www.morethanyourself.com.

Introduction to the 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Forgiveness dominates as the theme of this week's readings. We all pray that our God will forgive us, but the Scriptures will show us forgiveness is two-sided coin.

Book of Sirach (27:30 to 28:7) "Wrath and anger are hateful things, yet the sinner hugs them tight."

This book goes by *two* names: Sirach and Ecclesiasticus (not the other book titled Ecclesiastes). The first recalls its author, Jesus, the son of Sirach. The second refers more to its welcome and acceptance by Christians in apostolic times (1st c. AD/CE). Sirach stands as the epitome of practical wisdom. It elaborates on faithful living more clearly, even, than the Book of Proverbs. Originally written in Hebrew ca. 180-175 BC/BCE, the author's grandson (unnamed) then translated the book into Greek (common language of most people) fifty years later.

The Greek version's preface (not part of the original biblical text) states: "My grandfather, Jesus, who devoted himself constantly to the reading of the Law, the Prophets, and the later Writings of our fathers and had acquired a thorough familiarity with them, began himself to write something about their teachings and wisdom, in order that people desiring to gain knowledge might take advantage of his writings and make even greater progress in living according to the law."

Psalms 103 (1-4, 9-12) "Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all my being, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits."

Too often, we think of God as far away in "heaven." Psalm 103 reminds us our God loves not from afar but inside us and in our home, our everyday life. Our gratitude for God's mercy merges into hymns of praise. This psalm calls us to consider *both* the greatness and nearness of our God.

Romans 14: 7-9 "No one lives for oneself, and no one dies for oneself. For if we live, we live for the Lord; if we die, we die for the Lord."

Paul taught the blended Christian communities in Rome that Christianity does tolerate elitist groups (e.g., "My Jesus community is more Christian than yours"). The apostle reminds the Jewish and pagan converts of their equality. No one should claim, "We found Jesus first, so that makes us better than you."

Matthew 18: 21-35 "Peter approached Jesus and asked him, 'Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive? As many as seven times?'"

This weekend's gospel offers a vivid example of Christian life "gone sour." This happens when we ask God to forgive our sins repeatedly but place limits on our forgiveness of *others*. In Chapter 18, Matthew elaborates for his mid-1st Century (AD/CE) audience on Jesus' teaching about how to live a Christian life within their local faith communities. Here we have a vivid expansion of what Jesus first taught in

the Lord's prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against."

Note: Later in this reflection, we will recommend listening to Bishop Robert Barron's teaching on forgiveness. If you wish to get a head start, you may prefer to watch it now.

A Reading from the Book of Sirach (27: 30 to 28: 7)

"Grudge and wrath, these also are abominations in which sinful people excel. Don't bear grudges. He who demands revenge will suffer the vengeance of the Lord who keeps a strict account of his sins. Forgive the mistakes of your neighbor and you may ask that your sins be forgiven. If a man bears resentment against another, how can he ask God for healing? If he has no compassion on others, how can he pray for forgiveness for his sins? As long as he, mere flesh, is resentful, who will obtain his pardon? Remember your end and give up hatred. Keep in mind your final corruption in the grave and keep the commandments. Remember the commandments and do not bear grudges against your neighbor. Remember the Covenant with the Most High and overlook the offense."

Personal Reflection

Sirach writes that forgiveness is incomplete when all we say is, "I forgive you."

— *See if you can identify in Sirach 27 that missing second element of the forgiveness process, without which our act of forgiveness is rendered incomplete, if not meaningless?*

— *How difficult is it for me to add that second "missing piece" to my words and acts of forgiveness? What needs to change inside of me to make my forgiveness of the "offender" complete?*

Antiphon: Psalm 103 (1-4, 9-12)

Praise of God's love

The Lord is kind and merciful, slow to anger, and rich in compassion.

Praise Yahweh, my soul;
all my being, praise his holy name!
Praise Yahweh, my soul, and do not forget all his kindness;
he forgives all your sins and heals all your sickness;
he redeems your life from destruction
and crowns you with love and compassion.

The Lord is kind and merciful, slow to anger, and rich in compassion.

He will not always scold nor will he be angry forever.
He does not treat us according to our sins,
nor does he punish us as we deserve.
As the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is his love for those fearing him.
As far as the east is from the west,
so far does he remove from us our sins

The Lord is kind and merciful, slow to anger, and rich in compassion.

Personal Reflection

Take special notice of the words/phrases the psalmist uses to describe Yahweh's manner of forgiveness and reconciliation.

- *How do I measure up when it comes to having compassion for someone who has "done me wrong"? In what areas of my life and relationships—today—will I resolve to apply Yahweh's attitude toward human weakness to my own relationships.*
- *How is the forgiveness process—or lack of it—visible in the U.S. today?*
- *What can I do (yes, "little old me") to help heal the brokenness, rancor, and deep divisions that swirl around me today?*

Second Reading: From St. Paul's Letter to the Romans (14: 7-9)

Brothers and sisters: "None of us lives for himself, nor dies for himself. If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. Either in life or in death, we belong to the Lord. It was for this purpose that Christ both died and came to life again, to be Lord both of the living and of the dead."

Personal Reflection

Paul teaches that Jesus died for our sins but kept coming back to win the hearts of people, across the *two millennia* since that first Good Friday. Essentially, Paul is saying to me, "Not everything's about you!"

- *Today, how does my Christian life in real-world America measure up to the Apostle's model of selflessness? On a "selflessness" scale of 1-10 (10 being the highest), how would I grade myself?*
- *What is my attitude toward people of other faith communities (Orthodox, Protestant [all forms], Jewish, Eastern religions? Do I feel sorry for them and privileged to have inherited or converted to the one true faith community? Or do I see them as equals in our common search for and love of God?*

Proclamation from the Gospel according to Matthew (18: 21-35)

“Peter asked Jesus, ‘Lord, how many times must I forgive the offenses of my brother or sister? Seven times?’

“Jesus answered, ‘No, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. This story throws light on the kingdom of Heaven: A king decided to settle accounts with his servants. Among the first of them was one who owed him ten thousand pieces of gold. As the man could not repay the debt, the king commanded that he be sold as a slave along with his wife, his children, and all his goods, as repayment.

“The servant threw himself at the feet of the king and said, ‘Give me time, and I will pay you back everything.’

“The king took pity on him, and not only set him free, but even canceled his debt.

“When this servant left the king’s presence, he met one of his fellow servants, who owed him a hundred pieces of silver. He grabbed him by the throat and almost choked him, shouting, ‘Pay me what you owe!’

“His fellow servant threw himself at his feet and begged him, ‘Give me time, and I will pay everything.’

“But the other did not agree and sent him to prison until he had paid all his debt.

“The servants of the king saw what had happened. They were extremely upset, so they went and reported everything to their lord.

“Then the lord summoned his servant and said, ‘Wicked servant, I forgave you all that you owed me when you begged me to do so. Weren’t you bound to have pity on your fellow servant, as I had pity on you?’ The lord was now angry. He handed the wicked servant over to be punished, until he had paid the whole debt.

“Jesus added, ‘So will my heavenly Father do with you, unless you sincerely forgive your brothers and sisters.’”

Personal Reflection

— *What’s up with the number 7 in the Bible and in this passage: “7 times?” No, Peter, “70 times 7”? To learn more on this topic, follow this link to Christianity.com.*

— *With which part of this passage and parable do I most identify: the king, the forgiven servant, or the ones that servant punished? Why?*

— *What am I prepared to do—starting today—to bring myself closer to the model of compassionate living that Jesus presents?*

Shelter-in-Place

Schools are now open across the U.S., either virtually or in person.

— *How is that working for my family. How willing am I to get more actively involved in my children's education on a day-to-day basis?*

— *If I am still working and need to leave the house to fulfill the duties of my employment, what accommodations have I made regarding supervision of students attending virtual classes at home.*

Presidential and other political campaigns, including local ones, are in full gear. Given that no candidate for any office, from president down to city council candidates, is a "living saint," our political choices call for thoughtful spiritual discernment.

— *How open am I to weighing the pros and cons of each candidate I vote for, or do I simply vote along party lines?*

— *Since voting is a privilege, a right, and a sacred act and (not available to all citizens of the world), what provisions will I make to see that my ballot is safely cast or delivered to the appropriate place?*

"What would Jesus do?" (WWJD) is a popular saying. If I'm a "single party" or "single issue" voter, perhaps this quote from the late Fr. Brian Joyce will help: "What would Jesus want **me** to do?"

— *"What would Jesus want me to do about voting in the coming election? Is Jesus on my side? Or do I need to be on His, even if it requires stretching beyond my comfort zone?*

Write about your feelings and your lived experience of these issues during your journaling time (below).

Journaling Prompts

What insights have I gained from reflecting on the readings for the 24th Sunday of Ordinary Time in light of my current social demands and restrictions. Suggested prompt:

— *After reflecting on the three readings, what made the deepest impression on me?*

We mustn't simply be grateful "recipients" of God's good gifts. We need to be "givers," too.

— *How will this week's Scriptures and current societal events impact the way I think, live, love—and "give back"—during the week ahead?*

For Inspirational Viewing / Listening / Reading

Watch/Listen:

Take 10 minutes to listen to Bishop [Robert Barron's](#) talk on [Anger and Forgiveness](#). He uses this week's gospel passage, Matthew 18: 21-25, to separate the *feeling* of anger from the *sin* of anger. He goes on to explain how forgiveness is possible, even in the presence of *unforgettable* memories of past hurts.

["Forgive and Forget": Is It Really Possible?](#) a reflection on forgiveness by [Jackie Angel](#) (6 min)

Read:

[Forgiving Day by Day: Practicing God's Ways in Our Relationships](#) by [Judith Ingram](#)

The author provides spiritual medicine for healing past wrongs—the ability to first forgive then to seek reconciliation, if possible. The short daily readings are not time-demanding, but their payoff is a curative call to allow divine grace to right past wrongs. Each of the daily reflections adds over time to a mounting conviction that forgiveness is not a once-and-done virtue but a call to day-by-day release of negative thoughts.

Note: Judith Ingram is one of my writer-colleagues and a dear friend.

Preview of Next Session

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 55: 6-9 "Seek the Lord while he may be found."

Psalms 145: 2-3, 8-9, 17-18 "The Lord is gracious and merciful; slow to anger, rich in kindness."

Letter of St. Paul to the Philippians 1: 20-24, 27 "For me Christ is life and death is gain."

Matthew 20: 1-16 Parable of the generous employer: "Summon the laborers and give them their pay."

Closing Prayer

(edited and abridged for use here)

Prayer of Repentance

Lord Jesus, give me a heart that is humble, able to repent even for small mistakes.

Send your Spirit of Truth, that I may know who I am to you.

Take away from my heart all self-righteousness and self-centeredness.

Give me, Lord, a heart generous enough to remove pride, jealousy, envy, anger, hatred, revenge, and any lack of mercy and kindness.

Give me a heart that thinks and speaks well of others, that rejoices in others' success.

Lord change my heart. Give me a heart like yours.

Amen.

From [Lord Calls](#)

Questions?

Send any questions or comments you might have to algarrotto@comcast.net

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(follow the link above to the novel [Bishop Myriel: In His Own Words](#))