

Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time



This Sunday's liturgy prompts us to reflect on our capacity to forgive. Throughout our recovery from lust addiction, sexual compulsions, and relationship attachments, we will continue to find ourselves in situations that call upon our mercy and forgiveness—two gifts that can be best kept by giving them away. This Sunday's Gospel Reading, which wraps up our reflection, makes this abundantly clear.

First, recovery literature offers a strategy to help overcome resentments when they appear, even when our feelings seem justified. “We realized that the people who wronged us were perhaps spiritually sick. Though we did not like their symptoms and the way these disturbed us, they, like ourselves, were sick too. We asked God to help us show them the same tolerance, pity, and patience that we would cheerfully grant a sick friend. When a person offended we said to ourselves, ‘This is a sick man. How can I be helpful to him? God save me from being angry. Thy will be done’” (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, p. 66).

Last week, we heard Jesus speak about fraternal correction. Remember, we are directed to speak to the person who has offended us then include a few others if he does not respond one-on-one. If a small group does not spur reform, tell the Church and invite community prayer. If that is ineffective, set up healthy boundaries and continue to treat the person with dignity and mercy. Harboring a resentment because someone is not behaving as we would like is far from the Christian way.

Of course, the disciples have follow-up questions, which prompts Jesus to double-down on his demand to repeatedly forgive:

*Peter approached Jesus and asked him,
“Lord, if my brother sins against me,
how often must I forgive?
As many as seven times?”
Jesus answered, “I say to you,
not seven times but seventy-seven times.*

While it is nice to hear someone say, “I forgive you,” we find deep spiritual relief when we form forgiveness in our own hearts—for others and for ourselves. We recognize resentment as a primary source of relapse and a path back to old patterns of behavior, stealing peace and serenity from us like a thief. Jesus offers a parable to make this point clear and, in conclusion, invites us to pass along the merciful love of God onto others:

That is why the kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king who decided to settle accounts with his servants.

When he began the accounting, a debtor was brought before him who owed him a huge amount.

Since he had no way of paying it back, his master ordered him to be sold, along with his wife, his children, and all his property, in payment of the debt.

At that, the servant fell down, did him homage, and said,

'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back in full.'

Moved with compassion the master of that servant let him go and forgave him the loan.

When that servant had left, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a much smaller amount.

He seized him and started to choke him, demanding,

'Pay back what you owe.'

Falling to his knees, his fellow servant begged him,

'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.'

But he refused.

Instead, he had the fellow servant put in prison until he paid back the debt.

Now when his fellow servants saw what had happened, they were deeply disturbed, and went to their master and reported the whole affair.

His master summoned him and said to him,

'You wicked servant!

I forgave you your entire debt because you begged me to.

Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant, as I had pity on you?'

Then in anger his master handed him over to the torturers until he should pay back the whole debt.

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

Reflection Questions

- How are you currently dealing with resentment?
 - What recovery tools and strategies have helped you overcome this poison?
- How has receiving God's forgiveness and mercy made you more forgiving and merciful toward others (and yourself)?
- What help do you need?

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Sunday Mass Readings this Week

First Reading: Sirach 27:30-28:7

Responsorial Psalm: Ps 103:1-2, 3-4, 9-10, 11-12

Second Reading: Romans 14:7-9

Gospel: Matthew 18:21-35