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Tuesday's Gospel: The Limit to Forgiving

Tuesday in the 3rd Week of
Lent, and commentary.

Gospel (*Mt 18:21-35*)

Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?”

Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven. Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began the

reckoning, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents; and as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him the lord of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But that same servant, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat he said, 'Pay what you owe.' So his fellow servant fell down and besought him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' He refused and went and put him in prison till he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord

summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you besought me; and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ And in anger his lord delivered him to the jailers, till he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

Commentary

Today our Lord speaks to us about the need for forgiveness through a conversation with the Apostle Peter. Daily life spent close to Jesus with the other Apostles leads Peter to ask a question about an attitude that he has seen in Jesus but that he himself finds difficult: forgiving others. Peter approaches Jesus with trust and asks

him: Lord, how many times do I have to forgive my brother when he sins against me?

Peter suggests to Jesus quite a high number: up to seven times. In the language of the Bible the number seven indicates perfection. That is how Peter sees it, as a very generous way of acting. But Jesus answers that he must forgive seventy times seven times. That is, always. There should be no limit to our forgiveness. That is how God sees it, with unbounded generosity.

Jesus then gives the example of the servant whose master forgives his debt. An enormous debt of 10,000 talents, an astronomical sum. But the servant in turn refuses to forgive his fellow servant a much small amount than what he has been forgiven.

The parable ends with some words of Jesus about the heavenly Father's forgiveness. "So also my heavenly

Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.” If we forgive others God will forgive us; but if we fail to do so we will not receive God's forgiveness.

With this example our Lord wants us to understand that forgiving others is based on the forgiveness that God always grants us. Just as God never tires of forgiving us, so we must strive to always forgive others.

We continue traveling the Lenten path. Today the Gospel offers us this teaching about forgiveness. Let us contemplate with wonder the forgiveness that God grants us so generously in the sacrament of Penance. And to show our gratitude let us strive, with God's grace, to act in the same way towards our brothers or sisters when they offend us.

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