

Thursday's Gospel: Forgiving Always

Gospel for Thursday in the 19th Week of Ordinary Time, and commentary.

Gospel (*Mt 18:21 – 19:1*)

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?”²² 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.”

Now when Jesus had finished these sayings, he went away from Galilee and entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan.

Commentary

How many times do I have to forgive my brother or sister? Up to seven times? Jesus answers Peter’s question with words of mercy and forgiveness that go far beyond human logic.

Peter anticipated Jesus response in a way. The number seven does not mean an exact number; It symbolized for the Jewish people perfection, abundance and plenitude. In other words, Peter is suggesting that we should forgive our brother always, within reason.

Jesus' response is much more generous. We must always forgive our brother – absolutely always, no matter what happens. Peter's careful formulation is shown to be much too narrow, and he receives a lesson about loving with a big heart.

Jesus does so with a story about two servants. The first owed an enormous amount, 10,000 talents, the annual salary of many thousands of workers. Moved by mercy, the master of the servant forgives him his debt. Of course, the lord is God the Father, who forgives us

everything when we ask him sincerely for pardon.

But then the first servant meets a co-worker, who owed him one hundred denarii, that is, the daily salary of one hundred workers. He refuses to forgive him, and puts him in prison. While God is compassionate and merciful to us, we are mean and demanding to those around us.

What I have to forgive my brother of is little compared to what God has forgiven me. In fact, if we were aware of it, it is little compared to what Jesus forgives me every day. As the lord said: “should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?” And he revokes his forgiveness.

It can be difficult to forgive. Still, forgiveness is at the heart of the Gospel; it is the Christian way of being. Christ lived, died and rose again to offer us God’s forgiveness.

First, we receive it, and then we are called to make it possible for others to experience it too. Thus the circle of Christ's love expands more and more to encompass ever more people, more sisters and brothers, more lost sheep.

Forgiving like this requires charity; it requires humility and prayer. Only charity without limits and without conditions can forgive.

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