

**Twenty Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A**  
**Forgive Seventy-seven Times**

Sir 27:30-28:7; Rom 14:7-9; Matt 18:21-35

Today is the twenty fourth Sunday of ordinary time. Last Sunday's gospel, Jesus called us to be willing to correct and reconcile with each other, willing to point out to another when he or she has wronged us. This Sunday we followed up by talking about forgiving those who do wrong. And Jesus in today's gospel asks us to reflect on how we forgive. Not just once but again and again. However, forgiveness is a hard thing. It is not easy to forgive someone who has hurt us. But Jesus would like us to forgive and reconcile with others. So the theme of the readings for today is all centered on God's mercy and forgiveness.

The first reading of today from the book of Sirach focuses on forgiveness. First, it reminds us that for our prayer to be answered, we must forgive others. Second, it presupposes that we are all sinners, in need of God's forgiveness. So, for us to be forgiven, first, we must forgive others. Therefore, Sirach urges us: "*Forgive your neighbor the hurt he/she does to you, and when you pray, your sins will be forgiven.*" It means that God will forgive our sins, if we forgive others. This is a call to liberate others, in order to liberate and heal ourselves too.

Saint Paul, in the second reading, reminds us of something very important. He said, "*The life and death of each of us has its influence on the other.*" Also, our ability to forgive has a great influence on the other, as well as, on ourselves. Thus, it is important to note that, forgiveness has a double effect. It is a single dose of medicine that cures one or many persons at the same time. It liberates the one who is forgiven, as well as heals the one who forgives.

In our gospel today, we just heard the dialogue between Jesus and Peter about forgiveness. Jesus takes forgiveness to a different and practical level. Saint Peter asked Jesus how many times they had to forgive people who hurt them. He asked Jesus if forgiving seven times were enough. Peter might think that he was so generous in stretching the number to seven. This is because Peter was thinking in a Jewish way that they are only allowed to forgive those who offended them three times, after that no more. They reckoned that after three times, the offender does not deserve any more forgiveness. By saying it, Peter thought Jesus would be pleased with his generosity in forgiving seven times. But Jesus made it clear with his answer: "*Not seven times, but seventy- seven times.*" You can imagine Peter's surprise when the Jesus answered, forgiveness must be unlimited, and we should always forgive. Jesus' response, simply reminds us that Christian forgiveness does not have limits. We must forgive all, always and forever as the prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi says: *Wherever there is injury, there is forgiveness.* Thus, to demonstrate this, Jesus tells a parable of the merciless official.

The servant owned the king a huge amount of money but he could not pay his debt even if he worked his whole life. The servant was forgiven a great debt by the king, but this same servant could not forgive his fellow servant who owed him a much smaller amount. He refused his fellow servant's plea for mercy and put him in jail. Surely the merciless servant was cast into prison when he refused to forgive his fellow servant. Jesus then gave the moral teaching of the parable: my heavenly Father will treat you in exactly the same way, unless each of you forgive your and sister and brother from your heart. Jesus was here extolling the virtue of mercy or forgiveness. The message of this parable is that we must treat others mercifully. We must

forgive, because God forgives us every day. If God has shown mercy to us in granting us pardon for our sins, then we, in turn, must show mercy and forgiveness towards every person who has offended us.

During Jesus' doing ministry, he not only preached mercy on this earth, but he practiced it as well. He forgave Mary Magdalene; he forgave the sins of the woman accused of adultery. He forgave the sins of paralytic at Capernaum, the man sick with palsy. Even while suffering the cruel torments of crucifixion, he forgave the sins of the good thief hanging beside him on the cross. Jesus always practiced what he preached, and he asks us to do same today. He reminds us of the need to forgive our brothers and sisters. Forgiving those who have hurt us is not easy. The bigger the hurt the more difficult it is to forgive and for many people also the longer it takes to forgive. So it is not easy to forgive and to let go when someone has hurt us. Especially there are some offences and insults that go on hurting us, but that is what God asks us to do. God will treat us the way that we treat others. So we must continually forgive others so that God will continually forgive us.

Besides, we are told "Forgive and forget." The thing is if only we could forget, and forgiveness would come easy. Some others say: "I forgive, but not forget." I cannot forget because the wound is very deep. But that is what Jesus asks us to do. Jesus is so clear in his teaching: if you do not forgive, how can you possibly ask forgiveness? It is a very difficult task and very challenging us. We must pray to God for the power to forgive, for it is in forgiving that we are healed. Moreover, if we forgive other people, then God will forgive us. So, we must forgive ourselves too, in order to continue living in peace with ourselves.

Brothers and Sisters,

Let us go with God's help. With God's grace we can practice forgiveness of those who have harmed us in any way at all. In doing so we shall be imitating Christ himself. Forgiveness of others makes us worthy of God's forgiveness. It will make us worthy of eternal reward hereafter. As we continue to celebrate the Eucharist, together we recite a prayer of Our Father that Jesus had taught us: *"Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."* Amen!