

24th Sunday of Ordinary Time - September 13, 2020 - Year A

The theme or message of this week's gospel is clearly forgiveness and mercy. We seek forgiveness from others...and we should extend mercy and forgive others...but do we? We are meant to treat others the way God has treated us in Christ, sharing with them the life-giving and forgiving love of Jesus.

The heart of Peter's question in today's Gospel. "What does forgiveness look like, Lord, forgiving my brother seven times?" That seems like a reasonable number, does it not? But Jesus turns Peter's question into a statement...not merely 7 times, but 70 times 7 times. That's Bible speak for all the time.

A servant had no means to pay his debt to his master. He throws himself figuratively at his master's feet, and the debt is miraculously forgiven! Yet, rather than reforming his life, changing his heart, and sharing with others the mercy just shown him, the servant imprisons someone who owes him a much smaller amount. In response, the master hands him over to the *torturers until he should pay back the whole debt.*

Jesus owes us nothing, but he has given us everything. He has forgiven the worst things we have ever done. He would forgive the worst things we could ever imagine. And yet, with all that mercy to draw from, free for the taking, he still finds us holding grudges over much smaller wrongs done to us by the hands of another.

When we hold a grudge, we demonstrate that we have not understood this gospel message. Holding a grudge adds stress to our lives, makes us miserable, shows us to be stubborn and pig-headed. Forgiving releases the stress, removes the elephant from the room, and allows us to live in peace. What have you ever gained by holding a grudge or refusing to forgive someone?

We do not deserve or merit the mercy God has shown us in Christ. We can't earn it and we can't repay it. But we can live it. We can forgive, and we can seek forgiveness. And as "seventy-seven" represents the limitless nature of God's mercy toward us – so we can make it represent ours to one another. So, if you really want to live, seek forgiveness and extend forgiveness. Just do it. Don't bother counting how many times. Forgiving

does not mean that you approve of what caused the hurt. Rather forgiving means that you can rise above whatever caused the hurt. As we pray each day: “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” Make sure that we mean those words.