

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A

GOSPEL

Jerusalem Bible © 1966 by Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd and Doubleday & Company Inc.

Peter went up to Jesus and said, 'Lord, how often must I forgive my brother if he wrongs me? As often as seven times?' Jesus answered, 'Not seven, I tell you, but seventy-seven times.'

And so the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who decided to settle his accounts with his servants. When the reckoning began, they brought him a man who owed ten thousand talents; but he had no means of paying, so his master gave orders that he should be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, to meet the debt. At this, the servant threw himself down at his master's feet. "Give me time," he said, "and I will pay the whole sum." And the servant's master felt so sorry for him that he let him go and cancelled the debt.

Now as this servant went out, he happened to meet a fellow servant who owed him one hundred denarii; and he seized him by the throat and began to throttle him. "Pay what you owe me," he said. His fellow servant fell at his feet and implored him, saying, "Give me time and I will pay you." But the other would not agree; on the contrary, he had him thrown into prison till he should pay the debt.

His fellow servants were deeply distressed when they saw what happened, and they went to their master and reported the whole affair to him. Then the master sent for him. "You wicked servant," he said, "I cancelled all that debt of yours when you appealed to me. Were you not bound, then, to have pity on your fellow servant just as I had pity on you?" And in his anger the master handed him over to the torturers till he should pay all his debt.

And that is how my heavenly Father will deal with you unless you each forgive your brother from your heart.'

(Matthew 18:21-35)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The sum of ten thousand talents would have been an impossibly huge debt. A Jewish talent was made of silver, weighing 43 620 grams!
- A debt of one hundred denarii was still a hefty sum. The denarius was a commonly used Roman coin made of silver, weighing 3.64 grams. A denarius was the wage paid for one day's casual labour.
- The use of the word *torturers* in this text is problematic. The Greek term is linked to the notion of 'tormentors'. It may be that the debtor's friends and relations would more vigorously try to raise the necessary funds if the culprit is undergoing torment but it may also be an eschatological reference given what follows in the next verse.

EXPLORING THE WORD

Jesus' teaching about the need to settle conflict, the basis of last week's gospel, was a surprising summons for Christians to fly in the face of accepted standards of judgement and condemnation. Here the teaching becomes even more outrageous! There is no end to the forgiveness offered.

For the average person, represented by Peter, forgiving another person seven times would show a very substantial commitment to mercy. Seven is used in the Bible to signify perfection, so Peter is not being mean in his suggestion. This is a very reasonable degree of tolerance. Yet Jesus, in his parable of the servant who is forgiven a debt equivalent to millions but cannot forgive his fellow a lesser sum, turns our human understanding of what constitutes a fair thing on its head. God's forgiveness is prodigious, but it is dependent on our willingness to forgive each other in the same way. The inability or unwillingness of the servant to match the master's forgiveness provides a powerful contrast. The master forgives in compassion, but the servant resorts to violence. If one has truly experienced the loving forgiveness of God, it must be shared with others.

- Look together at the penitential rite of the Mass. Explain its significance and place in the liturgy.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- To whom are you indebted? Can you acknowledge what you owe to these people?
- Reflect on a time when you felt wronged. What happened? What were your feelings? How did you react to the perpetrator? What was the outcome? Were you able to forgive the action and move on? How do you experience God's forgiveness? Write down some responses and share them with the person next to you.
- What needs healing and reconciliation in your life? Work on that this week.
- In the Lord's Prayer, we ask forgiveness from God and pledge to forgive those who wrong us. Pray it often this week.

