

Fr. John Sassani
Homily Given September 4, 2011
Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time - Liturgical Year A

This is, like all the others!, a challenging portion of the gospel. The words of Jesus at the end of the passage are about us - "Where two or three gather in my name, there I am in their midst." It is not just where only two or three gather; it is the whole community here. The whole parish, the Archdiocesan Church, the worldwide Church.

But life at every level of the Church is different - one thing that's meant to be standard is forgiveness and growth. Challenging bad behavior is part of living life in common with others. If I were sitting around doing nothing but watching movies, Dennis Sheehan would be challenging me, then the staff...then the Cardinal! If you were doing something wrong, same thing - but, before it would get too far, you'd be registering at St. Bernard's!

So it may seem like a challenging and impractical teaching. Steve Covey, the author of *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, says that priorities are determined by context. So what is the context of this gospel passage? The two stories on either side of it are

The parable of the lost sheep and the shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine to go find the one - and -

The unmerciful man who owed someone a huge debt and, when he begged for mercy, had the debt wiped clean - but then went out and held a fellow servant accountable for a tiny amount.

The message, in context, is: Blessed are the merciful. Mercy is a gift, given as forgiveness, as support, as guidance, as challenge. Mercy is at the heart of the Gospel *because* Christ's heart is merciful.

Think about the ways you have benefited by mercy - I know I have. Let's ask the Lord to help us grow in mercy, as individuals and as a community. That way, we can help reveal that Christ's purpose in coming is our purpose being in the world - to make it a more merciful place.