



September 17, 2023
24th Sunday of Ordinary Time

"...How often must I forgive?"
Matthew 18:21



Dear Friends;

Lately I have been streaming the series New Amsterdam. It is the story of a public hospital in New York that cares for anyone that comes to them. In the last episode that I watched; the administrator decides to start a palliative care unit. They would care for those for whom there are no more treatments and in the last stages of dying. He assigned every doctor a patient in the unit telling them to help the patients with what they need in their last phase of life.

The psychiatrist Dr. Iggy was assigned a young man who look like he was wasting away to nothing. Dr Iggy asked the young man is there anything that he could do for him. The young man responded, *"I want to see my father."* Iggy said, *"where is your father?"* The young man responded, *"I don't know, I haven't seen or spoken with him in 12 years."* Iggy responds, *"I understand my father was also distant and emotionally unavailable."*

Eventually the doctor locates the father. Iggy brings the father to his son's room. Iggy announces to the semi-conscious man that his father was there. The father knelt close to his son's head and said I'm here. The son then softly says, *"I have always hated you."* And then he dies. It was a shocking moment.

The psychiatrist, Iggy, tells the father *"I know this is awful. I hated my father. But I also loved him and never stopped wanting his approval. Your son also loved you and you can still make it right."* The father says, *"But it is too late now."* Iggy replied *"It is too late for your son, but not for you. You can heal it."* Then the father and knelt by his dead son and says, *"I am sorry that I did not know how to talk to you. I could not find the words to express my love, but I always loved you."* It was a bittersweet moment.

Originally, I thought there was going to be a reconciliation between father and son. That is why it was so awful when the son says, *"I've always hated you."* His emaciation was symbolic of the hate that was literally eating away at him.

Jesus makes clear in today's gospel, if we do not forgive others God *will not* forgive us. We protest, *"Why not? Isn't God all merciful and forgiving? Can't God forgive everything?"* The issue is not on the part of God. It is on us. Someone once said, *"The heavenly banquet table is open to everyone who is willing to sit down with everyone."* That is the catch. It is difficult for God to forgive us if we do not forgive others. Bitterness and hatred cannot enter heaven, they contradict heaven's very meaning.

In Middle Eastern culture honor is more important than money. In the parable the King has a servant who owes the equivalent of one hundred sixty-four thousand years of work, seven days a week. The king senses that if he deals harshly with the man his subjects will judge him to be a shameless man without honor. So, he decides to forgive the debt. He gains honor by this decision.

Shockingly, that same servant turns on a fellow servant in the same household. The servant who had been forgiven an extraordinarily large debt demands payment from the other servant and puts him in debtors' prison. He refused to show the same mercy shown him by his kingly patron. This makes a mockery of the king's mercy. This gets reported to the king. The king will be derided and laughed at. To protect his honor the king has no choice but to put this brazen slave where he belongs—jail!

The moral of the story is the disciples of Jesus must treat one another as God has treated them. They must take the honorable path and forgive from the heart.

Peace,

Fr Ron

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