

24<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Sunday  
September 17, 2023  
“Forgiveness – with NO Exceptions”

Sir 27:30 – 28:7  
Rom 14:7-9  
Mt 18:21-35

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord –

We have all been hurt by others in some way. We all have wounds and scars that do not go away. Perhaps, we were abused physically, because of the violence or the lust of others – Perhaps, it was emotional, due to the harsh or unkind words of others – Perhaps, it was spiritual in that it touched our souls and inclined us to sinfulness in its many forms. Some of the worst pain we can feel is when it comes from parents, children, siblings, spouse – or others we dearly love. We can even be hurt deeply when outsiders abuse, injure, or take the life of those we love – like the life of our children.

When we are hurt in any of these ways, we want to strike back. We want to retaliate – We want to hurt the original perpetrator the way that they hurt us – We want to pay them back.

However, a tragic thing happens whenever we embark upon vengeance. We become like the person who, originally, hurt us! We unleash a new violence upon them and the world. Yet, our violence can never make us whole again. It can never restore whatever, or whomever, we lost! Even the death penalty doesn't bring back the loved one we lost. And it makes us killers ourselves as we take the life of another human being!

Although it seems inconceivable – and impossible – the only sure way to healing on any level is through forgiveness. Forgiveness is a great liberating force. It frees us from the hatred and the rancor that eat at our heart – It frees us to go on with life and become a person truly created in the image of God – It gives us the creative energy that is possible only when we are, interiorly, free! The scriptures for today bolster all that we have considered, thus far.

In St. Matthew's Gospel, Peter asked Jesus how often should he forgive someone. And Jesus tells him that he must forgive every time – that there can be no number of the times he must forgive.

In the parable, the servant owed the king a debt that was impossible to pay. He begged for mercy – and would restore what was owed to the king. The king was moved – and he forgave the entire debt! Unfortunately, the servant didn't really learn anything. He had a co-worker who owed a comparatively small amount to him. Yet he had his co-worker thrown into debtor's prison to pay back whatever he was owed!

However, the unfairness of it all bothered the other servants. So when the king learned about what had happened, he turned over the original debtor to the torturers until he paid back everything. Of course, this meant that the unforgiving man would suffer intense pain – without any hope – for the rest of his life!

Then Jesus told everyone that an eternal hell of suffering awaits us – unless we truly forgive all injuries – from the depth of our heart and soul!

The Book of Sirach reminds us just how sinful we are ourselves. We have sinned against others – We have injured them and made life difficult for them. But every sin is also an offense against God! Sin always disrupts the divine order of things.

Sirach teaches us that wrath and anger are hateful things. We should deplore them because God deplores them. Furthermore, how can we expect forgiveness from God, if we don't forgive those who injure us? Sirach repudiates the “eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth” mentality – And this was almost 300 years before the time of Jesus!

Consequently, Brothers and Sisters, how do we live and deal with those who continue to hurt us? One answer is that we learn to live our own lives despite what others do. We avoid them – We don't put ourselves in harm's way. St. Paul tells us that we learn to live for God – and for God's ways – For in life or in death – we belong to the Lord God!

Jesus was the Son of God who entered our lives. Jesus also wants to enter our hearts. He came to Earth to bring us God's merciful love and forgiveness. He even submitted to the torturers and the cross – because of the debt that he carried on our behalf! Nevertheless, he rose to assure us of a life beyond any pain we experience here.

So, let us pray, for the healing power of God's grace.

May we forgive all who do us harm –

And may we be less unworthy of God's forgiveness and eternal love!

Amen.

September 17, 2023

Msgr. Russell G. Terra