

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

[Reading I: Sirach 27:30-28:7](#)

[Responsorial Psalm: 119:57, 72, 76-77, 127-128, 129-130](#)

[Reading II: Romans 14:7-9](#)

[Gospel: Matthew 18:21-35](#)

Readings may be found on the US Bishop's website:

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/091723.cfm>



The Book of Sirach is one of the books found in the Catholic and Orthodox Bibles but not in the Protestant editions. Originally in the collection of books used in the Greek-speaking synagogues from North Africa around to Rome, it was not included in the list approved by the rabbis in the Holy Land during the reorganization of Judaism in the 80s AD. It was written in Hebrew and translated into Greek about two hundred years before Jesus. It reflects some themes found in New Testament writings.

Sirach highlights the importance of forgiveness and the destructive power of anger, wrath, and vengeance. The author then connects this with the illogical assumption that one can seek to be forgiven while refusing to forgive others. This theme is further developed in the Gospel.

He sets the message in the context of taking the long view. What constitutes the fabric of your life? If it is anger and vengeance, there will be no room for mercy to enter. Where is your life going? We will all die, and what do you want to hold at the end of life? If your core value is anger, what will be left? If it is mercy and forgiveness, will these not show God's life?

Following Jesus' declaration last week of taking the first step in addressing a wrong or injury that has been committed, Peter asks how often. At the time of Jesus, the rabbinical teaching was that a person should be forgiven up to three times. Knowing that Jesus presents an ideal, Peter asks if seven times would be appropriate. Jesus responds with a reference to Lamech, who sought unlimited vengeance toward those who would harm him. (Gen 4: 24) Forgiveness should be unlimited, as that is how God forgives. To understand forgiveness, one must approach it qualitatively rather than quantitatively. It is not so much an action as it is an orientation toward others. Each of us sins and each of us needs forgiveness. So also, everyone else that we meet. All have sinned, and all need mercy. Mercy should be limitless.

The parable that Jesus tells has a different focus. It was given in a different context as it stresses that the one who has been forgiven should forgive. If that one does not understand forgiveness, he/she will not be able to receive it.

Jesus tells a parable (a story with a shocking turn) of a man who owes the king a large amount of money. The text says 10,000 talents. A talent is about 15 years' wages. So, the debt is 150,000 years' worth of wages or an astronomical sum. His response is to ask for time. The king knowing that the debt could never be repaid, forgives him. This presents an image of how God forgives us.

The servant goes out, not understanding the freedom that he was given. Instead, he goes after another servant who owes him about three months' wages. When this servant asked for time to repay the debt, which was possible, he would not listen to him and had him put in prison. The king then had the first servant put in prison because he did learn what forgiveness meant. This is a different theme than the unlimited forgiveness teaching of Jesus in the earlier part of the chapter. This theme is also presented in the Our Father, "Forgive us

our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Matt 6:12) and “For as you judge, so will you be judged, and the measure with which you measure will be measured out to you.” (Matt 7:2) One other dimension is the impact of being wounded or wounding someone else has on us. When we have been injured, the memory of it can use up a lot of energy. Things remind us of it and our attention is drawn back to it again. The same can happen when we knowingly wound someone else. Each time we hear their name or think of them, our attention goes to that event. One carries that around and is bound by it.

Forgiveness breaks the chain and frees us. I need to forgive those who have offended me so that I am free of the wound. I also need to forgive myself so that I can be free of my past mistakes. Forgiveness is not easy. It is the work of God, and it takes God’s help.

The common assumption of contemporary society is that one needs to look out for oneself. For St. Paul, this is the wrong understanding of life. For the Christian, one’s whole life is connected to God. Whether in life or in death, Christians belong to the Lord. God is with us every moment of life. All the choices that one makes, should be made in the awareness that one is in a relationship with God.

Themes:

Forgiveness

Mercy

Baptismal relation with God

Healing in Christ

Reflection Questions:

What are some of the different dimensions of hurt that you have experienced? (Physical, emotional, social, personal) How have these impacted you?

What is the hardest thing for you about beginning to forgive someone? about forgiving yourself?

What are some steps that you take in the process of forgiving yourself or someone?

How can you include God in your decision-making process each day?

Prayer Suggestions:

For the Church: that we who are God’s people, both in life and in death, may faithfully mediate God’s love, mercy, and forgiveness through our words and deeds

For the grace to forgive those who have wronged us: that God will free our hearts so that we may forgive others as God has forgiven us

For a deep awareness of God’s boundless forgiveness: that in our daily living and our experiences of our weaknesses, we may recognize how God’s unlimited forgiveness is available each day

For all who have injured or wronged us: that God’s love will heal them and us so that we may walk together again in God’s service

For healing of anger and resentment: that the Spirit will heal those painful experiences and free us to live fully for Christ