

Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

September 17, 2023

Limitless Forgiveness

Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA

What makes seven such an important number? It's the symbolism. It signifies wholeness, completeness, and totality. So, seventy-seven (or seventy times seven in some Bible translations) suggests infinity. Peter was exaggerating when he suggested that he might forgive his brother seven times. He presumed that if he acted in this way, his behavior would demonstrate the immeasurable extent of his personal graciousness. Jesus' response implied that there should be no end to our forgiving another. To underscore the significance of this magnanimity, Jesus offered God (in the guise of the king who forgave a huge debt) as the exemplar of forgiving.

Forgiving another's offense against us could well be one of the most difficult things we are asked to do. To ask for forgiveness does not seem as difficult. After all, when we bump into a perfect stranger in an elevator, we say, "Forgive me." But to forgive someone who has deliberately offended us, who has dishonored our sense of personal dignity, as slight as that offense might be, is neither as easy nor as casual a gesture. And yet, we must.

We all carry debts to others. Both the first reading and the Gospel passage remind us that the debts owed to us by others in no way compare with the debt we owe God, and yet God shows us compassion and forgives us. If we are grateful children of a compassionate God, we will want to be like God and we will forgive others. †

Sunday Readings

Sirach 27:30—28:7

Remember the covenant of the Most High, and overlook faults.

Romans 14:7-9

Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.

Matthew 18:21-35

Jesus answered, "I say to you, [forgive] not seven times but seventy-seven times."

*Jesus taught there
should be no end to our
forgiving one another.*



A Word from Pope Francis

How much suffering, how many wounds, how many wars could be avoided if forgiveness and mercy were the style of our life! Even in families....It is necessary to apply merciful love to all human relationships: between spouses, between parents and children, within our communities, in the Church and also in society and politics.

ANGELUS, ROME, SEPTEMBER 13, 2020



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS REFLECTION

- When you pray, "forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us," do you mean it?
- Who does it hurt when we fail to forgive?

From Forgiven to Forgiver

Fr. Henri Nouwen

Perhaps the most radical statement Jesus ever made is: “Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate.” God’s compassion is described by Jesus not simply to show me how willing God is to feel for me, or to forgive me my sins and offer me new life and happiness, but to invite me to become like God and to show the same compassion to others as he is showing to me. If the only meaning of the story were that people sin but God forgives, I could easily begin to think of my sins as a fine occasion for God to show me his forgiveness. There would be no real challenge in such an interpretation. I would resign myself to my weaknesses and keep hoping that eventually God would close God’s eyes to them and let me come home, whatever I did. Such sentimental romanticism is not the message of the Gospels.

What I am called to make true is that whether I am the younger or the elder son, I am the son of my compassionate Father. I am an heir. No one says it more clearly than Paul when he writes: “The Spirit himself joins with our spirit to bear witness that we are children of God. And if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, provided that we share his sufferings, so as to share his glory.” Indeed, as son and heir I am to become successor. I am destined to step into my Father’s place and offer to others the same compassion that he has offered me. The return to the Father is ultimately the challenge to become the Father. †

From *The Return of the Prodigal Son*

Avoid All Forms of Self-Rejection

Fr. Henri Nouwen

You must avoid not only blaming others but also blaming yourself. You are inclined to blame yourself for the difficulties you experience in relationships. But self-blame is not a form of humility. It is a form of self-rejection in which you ignore or deny your own goodness and beauty.

When a friendship does not blossom, when a word is not received, when a gesture of love is not appreciated, do not blame it on yourself. This is both untrue and hurtful. Every time you reject yourself, you idealize others. You want to be with those whom you consider better,

stronger, more intelligent, more gifted than yourself. Thus you make yourself emotionally dependent, leading others to feel unable to fulfill your expectations and causing them to withdraw from you. This makes you blame yourself even more, and you enter a dangerous spiral of self-rejection and neediness.

Avoid all forms of self-rejection. Acknowledge your limitations, but claim your unique gifts and thereby live as an equal among equals. That will set you free from your obsessive and possessive needs and enable you to give and receive true affection and friendship. †

From *The Inner Voice of Love*



Merciful God, give us generous hearts and open minds that we may forgive others as we have been forgiven. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

The Redemptorists

WEEKDAY READINGS

September 18–23

Monday, Weekday: 1 Tm 2:1–8 / Lk 7:1–10

Tuesday, Weekday: 1 Tm 3:1–13 / Lk 7:11–17

Wednesday, Sts. Andrew Kim Tae-gŏn, Priest, and Paul Chŏng Ha-sang, and Companions: 1 Tm 3:14–16 / Lk 7:31–35

Thursday, St. Matthew:


Eph 4:1–7, 11–13 / Mt 9:9–13

Friday, Weekday:

1 Tm 6:2c–12 / Lk 8:1–3

Saturday, St. Pius of Pietrelcina:

1 Tm 6:13–16 / Lk 8:4–15

Bringing Home
the Word 
September 17, 2023

© 2023 Liguori Publications, a ministry of the Redemptorists. One Liguori Drive, Liguori, MO 63057. Scripture quotations in this publication are from the *New American Bible*, revised edition, © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, DC. The Pope Francis quotation is used with permission and copyright © 2023 *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*. All rights reserved. 1-800-325-9521. Liguori.org.