

24th Sunday of the Year A

First Reading Ecclesiasticus 27:30 – 28:7

Resentment and anger, these are foul things, and both are found with the sinner. He who exacts vengeance will experience the vengeance of the Lord, who keeps strict account of sin. Forgive your neighbour the hurt he does you, and when you pray, your sins will be forgiven.

If a man nurses anger against another, can he then demand compassion from the Lord?

Showing no pity for a man like himself, can he then plead for his own sins? Mere creature of flesh, he cherishes resentment; who will forgive him his sins? Remember the last things, and stop hating, remember dissolution and death, and live by the commandments. Remember the commandments, and do not bear your neighbour ill-will; remember the covenant of the Most High, and overlook the offence.

Second Reading Romans 14:7-9

The life and death of each of us has its influence on others; if we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord, so that alive or dead we belong to the Lord. This explains why Christ both died and came to life, it was so that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

Gospel Matthew 18:21-35

Peter went up to Jesus and said, "Lord, how often must I forgive my brother if he wrongs me?

As often as seven times?" Jesus answered, "Not seven, I tell you, but seventy-seven times.

And so the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who decided to settle his accounts with his servants. When the reckoning began, they brought him a man who owed ten thousand talents; but he had no means of paying, so his master gave orders that he should be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, to meet the debt. At this, the servant threw himself down at his master's feet. 'Give me time,' he said, 'and I will pay the whole sum.' And the servant's master felt so sorry for him that he let him go and cancelled the debt. Now as this servant went out, he happened to meet a fellow servant who owed him one hundred denarii; and he seized him by the throat and began to throttle him. 'Pay what you owe me,' he said. His fellow servant fell at his feet and implored him, saying, 'Give me time and I will pay you.' But the other would not agree; on the contrary, he had him thrown into prison till he should pay the debt. His fellow servants were deeply distressed when they saw what had happened, and they went to their master and reported the whole affair to him. Then the master sent for him. 'You wicked servant,' he said. 'I cancelled all that debt of yours when you appealed to me. Were you not bound, then, to have pity on your fellow servant just as I had pity on you?' And in his anger the master handed him over to the torturers till he should pay all his debt. And that is how my heavenly Father will deal with you unless you each forgive your brother from your heart."

Meditation

Scripture abounds with accounts of God's tireless mercy. As often as his people fall into infidelity, so often does he stand ready to forgive them. One wonders that he does not grow weary of their ever-faltering love and call a halt to the endless story of sin, repentance and restoration.

He never does. He is the "prodigal Father" of the gospel parable. He would not dream of refusing pardon to a beloved child. Jesus reveals this attitude in action. He turns no sinner away.

Today's readings make it clear that God's pardon is given to be shared unstintingly. The community of the new covenant is characterized by the mutual love of its members. We are commanded to love one another as Christ has loved us. Forgiveness is the gift of love. So we must forgive one another as the Lord has forgiven us – "seventy times seven times," a biblical way of saying "without limit".

The scriptures suggest that God's forgiveness is not entirely unconditional. If we do not share it, we shall lose it. The inconstancy does not lie with God. If we have truly allowed ourselves to be transformed by his forgiving love, we can do no other than forgive one another. If we have refused to be so transformed, we have in fact rejected the gift of his pardon from the beginning.

Before we bring our gift to the altar, then, we must offer to share freely with one another the forgiveness we have freely received from God.