

Forgive and you will be forgiven

FORGIVING OTHERS punctuates the teaching of Jesus. He knew that if you're going to have a church, you'll need to know about forgiveness.

Forgiveness befits both the individual and the community. Matthew's own community surely faced radical tension. Some members were Jews; others Gentiles. All wanted to follow Christ. Getting along demanded forgiving old wounds.

Jesus links human forgiveness with divine forgiveness. Just when we look to God for an example we find that God's forgiveness somehow depends on ours. Jesus treats this theme elsewhere. The Lord's prayer (Matt 6:12, 14-15; Luke 11:4) submits that we forgive as we are forgiven. Drawing a lesson from the withered fig tree (Mark 11:25), Jesus proposes that we should forgive so that God will forgive us. In the sermon on the mount, he reminds us if we need forgiveness we should reconcile before offering a gift at the altar (Matt 5:23-25). In asking us to avoid judgment by not judging others Jesus says if we forgive we will be forgiven (Luke 6:37). All these passages imply that God's actions depends on ours. If we forgive, God will forgive.

Fr. Paul Turner



the
Good News
God's word in
everyday living

original Greek can mean either expression. The point remains the same: Forgive every single time.

However, after straightening Peter out, Jesus chooses to illustrate the saying with a parable which doesn't really address the point. It concerns forgiving thoroughly, not repeatedly. The earliest disciples may have joined these two independent sayings of Jesus to make them easier to remember.

In the parable, a slave owes his king an amount so huge, that the ruler prepares to sell off what his servant owes. Actually, bankruptcy seems a fair solution to the problem because of the size of the debt. Because the monetary systems of ancient civilizations have not come down to us with precision, determining the exact figure which hangs in the balance calls for an educated guess. Records indicate that one thousand talents probably equals around 12 million denarii — each denarius representing the payment for one day's work. Ten thousand talents in today's market, figuring the newly adjusted \$4.75 per hour as minimum wage, would equal around \$4,560,000,000. You read those zeros correctly — that's over \$4 billion. Working five days a week at minimum wage without any vacation, you'd need over 46,000 years to service that debt. If you won a \$30 million lottery jackpot not once, but 100 times, you still couldn't pay off the debt in next Sunday's Gospel. Bankruptcy seems sensible.

BUT THE SLAVE pleads for mercy, promising incredibly to pay it all back if he's just given time. The king forgives him not because he thinks he'll get his money, but because he is merciful.

The co-worker in the story owes the slave a single denarius, one day's wages. Thirty-eight dollars by today's minimum wage. The slave will not forgive even that small debt. That's why his punishment becomes so severe. So great are our individual and corporate transgressions against God that we could never make up for them. And yet we are forgiven. For our crimes against the poor, the unborn, the elderly, the immigrant, the telemarketer, and the driver of the next car — how could we ever make up for our evil? We cannot. Yet God is merciful. We cannot earn forgiveness, but we can lose it if we do not forgive others from the heart. □

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THE FIRST PART of the Gospel presents Peter posing a practical problem to Jesus. Matthew expresses irony by making Peter, no stranger to sin and weakness, the spokesperson. His questions sounds naive. "Should I forgive as many as seven times?" However, it's not such a dumb question. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus said if a person sins against you seven times a day and repents seven times, you must forgive seven times (17:4). Sevenfold forgiveness must have lurked in the sayings of Jesus. And Jesus' response may recall the sevenfold vengeance threatened against Cain and the seventy-sevenfold one against Lamech (Gen. 4:15, 23-24).

Does Jesus say to forgive "seventy times seven times" or "seventy-seven times?" Bibles differ. The

Daily Scripture Readings

Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time Sunday September 8

Ezekiel 33:7-9
Psalms 95:1-2, 6-9
Romans 13:8-10
Matthew 18:15-20

Monday, September 9

1 Corinthians 5:1-8
Psalms 5:5-6, 7, 12
Luke 6:6-11

Tuesday, September 10

1 Corinthians 6:1-11
Psalms 149:1-6, 9
Luke 6:12-19

Wednesday, September 11

1 Corinthians 7:25-31
Psalms 45:11-12, 14-17
Luke 6:20-26

Thursday, September 12

1 Corinthians 8:1b-7, 11-13
Psalms 139:1-3, 13-14, 23-24
Luke 6:27-38

Friday, September 13

1 Corinthians 9:16-19,
22b-27
Psalms 84:3-6, 8, 12
Luke 6:39-42

Saturday, September 14

Numbers 21:4b-19
Psalms 78:1-2, 34-38
Philippians 2:6-11
John 3:13-17

Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Sunday, September 15
Sirach 27:30-28:9
Psalms 103:1-4, 9-12
Romans 14:7-9
Matthew 18:21-35

