

Sunday Message

24TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

THE WORD

Year A • 17 September 2023 • Psalter Week 4



Peter and his companions must have got a terrible shock. Peter has just asked Jesus how many times should he forgive someone. Would seven times be enough? According to Jewish tradition, God forgives three times and punishes on the fourth. Since human beings could not be more forgiving than God, forgiveness was, therefore, limited to three times.

Peter must have thought that to forgive someone seven times was being more than generous since it went way beyond what Jewish tradition taught. And certainly, to a reasonable person, seven times seems very generous indeed.

But Jesus says it is not generous enough. The Christian must forgive not seven times, but seventy times seven. In other words, Jesus is saying that the Christian must never stop forgiving. There must be no limit to our mercy and forgiveness.

Mercy, Pope Francis reminds us in his letter *Gaudete et Exsultate*, is the fulfilment of the golden rule: "In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you."

"Giving and forgiving," explains Pope Francis, "means reproducing in our lives some small measure of God's perfection, which gives and forgives superabundantly."

Note the word 'superabundant.' The bigness of it, the extraordinary excess of it, the extravagant nature of it. God gives and forgives superabundantly. God gives and forgives without limit. God's mercy abounds and expands like the universe.

That's how we are called to live. To forgive - not once, not twice, not even 70 times - but today and tomorrow and everyday. To show mercy - not occasionally, not when we feel like it, not when we're coaxed or coerced into doing it, but today and tomorrow and everyday.

As Christians, we must always seek to forgive and to be forgiven. ■

REFLECT

It took Gary Ridgway nearly 20 years to be brought to justice. Ridgway, from Seattle in the USA, was a serial killer who told police he was missing the part of humanity that makes people care about others.

By the time he was caught, he had murdered at least 49 women, including a 16-year-old called Linda Rule. For years Linda's father, Robert, and her family sought justice for Linda. Finally, in 2003, Ridgway was arrested.

In court, Ridgway remained cold and without remorse. One by one, his victims' loved ones spoke from their hearts, expressing their contempt for the killer sitting before them. The courtroom was full of anger and pain,

understandably so. But the bespectacled Ridgway sat unmoved. The judge lambasted him for his "complete absence of compassion."

Then it was Robert Rule's turn to address the court. Rule was old by now; he worked as a Santa at a shopping centre and he looked the part. Plump, with a big white beard, he wore a pair of brightly coloured braces for his day in court. While family members of other victims had sobbed or screamed or wished death on Ridgway, Rule was composed as he faced his daughter's killer. What he said surprised everyone, including the cold-hearted murderer.

"Mr Ridgway, um," he began, "there are people here who hate you. I'm not one of them. I forgive you for what you've done.

PRAY

To forgive someone who has hurt us or betrayed us badly can be very difficult. Pray for the strength always to try to forgive.

LEARN

Forgiveness is at the heart of Jesus' message.

For the follower of Jesus, there can be no limit to mercy and forgiveness.

Forgiveness sets us free.

SAY

"The Lord is compassion and love."



DO

Confession is the wonderful celebration of God's forgiveness, which sets us free. How long is it since you have been to confession? Perhaps you could consider going this week.

You've made it difficult to live up to what I believe, and that is what God says to do, and that's to forgive. And he doesn't say to forgive just certain people. He says to forgive all. So you are forgiven, sir."

As the father spoke, Ridgway's chin began to quiver. He blinked rapidly. He started to weep. And then he took off his glasses to wipe the tears. Robert Rule's words of forgiveness got to Gary Ridgway's heart in a way no other words could.

That's the power of forgiveness. As Robert Rule demonstrated, and as Gary Ridgway discovered, forgiveness sets us free. ■

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

Give peace, O Lord, to those who wait for you,
that your prophets be found true.
Hear the prayers of your servant,
and of your people Israel.

GLORIA

Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to people of good will.

We praise you,
we bless you,
we adore you,
we glorify you,
we give you thanks for your great glory,
Lord God, heavenly King,
O God, almighty Father.

Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
you take away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us;
you take away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father,
have mercy on us.

For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.

COLLECT

Look upon us, O God,
Creator and ruler of all things,
and, that we may feel the working of your
mercy,
grant that we may serve you with all our
heart.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of
the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

FIRST READING Ecclesiasticus 27:30 - 28:7

A reading from the book of Ecclesiasticus.
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.

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

PSALM Psalm 102

Response:
The Lord is compassion and love, slow to
anger and rich in mercy.

1. My soul, give thanks to the Lord
all my being, bless his holy name.
My soul, give thanks to the Lord
and never forget all his blessings. (R.)
2. It is he who forgives all your guilt,
who heals every one of your ills,
who redeems your life from the grave,
who crowns you with love and
compassion. (R.)
3. His wrath will come to an end;
he will not be angry for ever.
He does not treat us according to our sins
nor repay us according to our faults. (R.)
4. For as the heavens are high above the
earth
so strong is his love for those who fear
him.
As far as the east is from the west
so far does he remove our sins. (R.)

SECOND READING Roman 14:7-9

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the
Romans.

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.

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia! Speak, Lord, your servant is
listening:
you have the message of eternal life.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL Mathew 18:21-35

A reading from the holy Gospel according to
Matthew.

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.'

The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with
the Father;

through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,

(all bow during the next three lines)

and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the
Virgin Mary,
and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under
Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,
the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is adored
and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and
apostolic Church.
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness
of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the
dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

Look with favour on our supplications, O Lord,
and in your kindness accept these, your
servants' offerings,
that what each has offered to the honour of
your name
may serve the salvation of all.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

How precious is your mercy, O God!
The children of men seek shelter in the
shadow of your wings.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

May the working of this heavenly gift, O Lord,
we pray,
take possession of our minds and bodies,
so that its effects, and not our own desires,
may always prevail in us.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.