

XXII TRINITY 2020
SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
FATHER CRAIG LOONEY
PHIL. 1.3-11 ST. MATT. 18.21-35



God loves to forgive...he takes no pleasure in punishing. In Psalm 103 we read about God's tendency to forgive...

The Lord is merciful and loving, slow to become angry and full of constant love.

He does not keep on rebuking; he is not angry forever.

He does not punish us as we deserve or repay us for our sins and wrongs...so great is his love for those who honor him.

Jesus gives us the perfect prayer about God's awesome power to forgive in the Lord's Prayer...

Forgive us the wrongs we have done...as we forgive the wrongs others have done to us.

The Gospel message is one of God's love and forgiveness...and about us forgiving others who have hurt us in word or action. The question today's Gospel poses: May we opt out of forgiving someone who continues to hurt us over and over again?

The Pharisees taught one must forgive another person two times to obey the Law. But they also taught one had to do better than the Law...so forgiving another person a third time went well beyond what the Law required.

Peter asks Jesus how many times he should forgive someone who keeps on sinning...seven times? Peter might have thought he was being over the top generous...since the rabbis taught three times was sufficient. Jesus replies we must be ready to forgive 490 times.

Peter might have been taken back by Jesus' reply he had to forgive someone 490 times. Jesus is saying there is no limit to the number of times we must be prepared to forgive another person no matter how badly they have hurt us. God's power to forgive us is infinite...we must extend that forgiveness to others.

The story about the servant who owed the king an amount of money he could never

hope to repay is about an ultimate act of forgiveness...and the failure of the servant to forgive a fellow servant who owed him very little money.

The king would have been perfectly justified confiscating the first servant's property and putting him and his family in jail until the debt was paid. Instead he showed compassion and forgave the entire debt. That was one kind and generous king!

The first servant now had the chance to show compassion and forgiveness toward a fellow servant. Instead, he puts his fellow servant in a chokehold and sends him off to jail until he gets his money back.

When the king hears about this he is justifiably angry. He calls the first servant a worthless slave who asked for more time to pay back what he owed...and had the whole debt wiped out. Guess what...it just got reinstated. Off to jail he goes...which amounts to a life sentence since he will never be able to repay the king.

What do we learn from today's Gospel? Peter might have been hoping there was a limit to how many times we must forgive someone. There isn't. If we refuse to forgive others...we're rejecting Jesus' perfect prayer about forgiveness. Jesus said we can expect God to treat us the same way...and choosing a life sentence now and forever without God's love, compassion and forgiveness is choosing life without hope.

What about the person who has hurt us and refuses to admit they have done anything wrong or ask for our forgiveness? C.S. Lewis wrote, *"To be Christian means to forgive the inexcusable...because God has forgiven the inexcusable in us."*

God forgives us because he wants to...not because he has to...knowing this makes our lives better...and should compel us to show the same kindness and compassion and unconditional love toward others God shows toward us.

God's forgiveness is a gift to us...our forgiveness of others is an obligation we must take seriously and act upon.

And forgiving others begins in our hearts!

