

XXII Trinity 2022
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney
Philippians 1.3-8 St. Matthew 18.21-35



Forgiveness is at the heart of our Christian faith. We receive God's forgiveness through faith in Jesus and his death on the cross. We are expected to extend forgiveness to others. But is there a limit on how many times we should forgive someone who has done us wrong?

The rabbis of Jesus' time taught the people they should forgive someone who has sinned against them three times. In the Gospel our friend Peter asks Jesus how many times he should forgive his brother who sinned against him. He was hoping Jesus would agree with him forgiving someone seven times was enough...after that you were off the hook in the forgiveness department.

But Jesus tells Peter not seven times...but seventy times seven. What Jesus is really saying is there is no limit on how many times we should forgive someone. God has an infinite capacity to forgive us...he expects us to do the same.

Jesus goes on to tell a story about what the Kingdom of heaven is like. It is a story about a worker who owed a king 10,000 talents. That sum of money represented about 200,000 years of labor...or about \$3.50 billion. The worker knew he could never repay the king the money he owed. What was he to do?

The worker had two options...pay the debt in full...or have his property confiscated and then be sold into slavery along with his wife and children. Since he couldn't repay the money...he and his family faced a life without parole sentence.

But the worker falls on his knees and asks for more time. The king is filled with compassion for the man and writes off his entire debt. He gives the man a fresh start...a new beginning free from the debt both he and the king knew he could never repay.

On his way home the man meets a co-worker who owes him 100 pence...a few hundred dollars in today's money. He seems to have forgotten the king had just forgiven him the huge debt he owed. He has his co-worker

arrested and put in jail. When the king finds out what the ungrateful worker has done to his co-worker...his reinstates the debt and puts him in prison.

The Story of the Ungrateful Servant teaches us that God's forgiveness of our sins is of enormous magnitude...through his death on the cross Jesus forgave a debt we could not possibly have repaid. C.S. Lewis, author of *Mere Christianity* wrote, "To be Christian means to forgive the inexcusable...because God has forgiven the inexcusable in us."

Forgiveness, like Christian love, should be a basic part of our nature as God's people. Jesus taught us in the most perfect prayer...the Lord's Prayer...forgive others just as God forgives us. What God wants us to do is adopt his standard of forgiveness as our own.

Jesus tells us we must forgive from the heart. We often let bad memories resurface that keep us from forgiving others the way we should. We hold grudges against those who have done us wrong. We want an apology first. But the kind of forgiveness Jesus is talking about...forgiveness from the heart...is unconditional. Jesus didn't demand an apology from the people who put him to death...he asked his Father to forgive them because they had no idea what they were doing.

There is another hard lesson we must learn from the Story of the Ungrateful Worker. Jesus began the story by saying this is what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. When we refuse to forgive others...we can expect to be treated no differently by God. God likes to forgive. When we refuse to forgive others...we reject God's forgiveness...just like the ungrateful worker ultimately rejected the king's extravagant act of mercy and compassion.

When it comes to forgiveness we must start by taking a good hard look at the person in the mirror. Have we done someone wrong? Do we blame others for our own faults and shortcomings?

Jesus tells us to forgive others from the heart. Forgiveness is, after all, what our faith is all about.

