

24TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, CYCLE A

Sirach 27: 30 – 28:7 + Psalm 103: 1-4, 9-12 + Romans 14: 7-9 + Matt. 18: 21-35

Holy Spirit Catholic Church: September 13, 2020

In chapter 18 of his Gospel, Matthew the Evangelist lays out what the Church is to be about.

Members of the community of faith are responsible to each other to maintain the unity which Christ Jesus established.

When hurtful words are spoken or hurtful deeds are done, it is not only the offender who bears responsibility for reconciliation but also the one offended.

Last Sunday we in Chapter 18 we heard of a process enacted by the offended party to reconcile with the one who hurt them, to bring them back to full communion.

This Sunday that responsibility toward one's brother or sister who has done wrong is made even more concrete in the act of forgiveness, which is not a one-time gift but an ongoing gift, healing the relationships with one's brothers and sisters in Christ.

The offended party cannot sit back and stew in their hurt and boil in their resentment, but instead offer forgiveness, again and again and again.

The cross marks every Christian.

The cross of Christ demands a life of sacrificial love,

and forgiveness is one of the major sacrifices offered out of love for the other.

Marked by the sign of God's unbounded love for us in Christ, we do not count or meagerly measure out forgiveness, but joined to Christ Jesus, forgive those who hurt us.

As Catholics we begin and end every prayer with the sign of the cross.

We start and we conclude the great prayer of the Mass with this eternal sign of God's forgiveness of the human race.

The prayers of the Mass reveal to us as the Church,

the community of faith coming together in the Lord's name, what we are to be about.

The Church is meant not only to be a community of forgiveness and reconciliation, but to share those gifts with the world.

But these gifts first need to be received in order to be shared.

So we begin every celebration of the Sacrifice of the Mass by crying out for the gift of the Lord's mercy.

We recognize as we begin this celebration that we hang onto hurt, we nurture anger, and we feed resentment, so we call out, “*Lord, have mercy.*”
Then we enter into the circulation of forgiveness, which flows from the Father through the Son, and by the power of the Spirit into our lives.

We breathe deeply of this breath of new life so to breathe it out onto others who need to know they are forgiven.
Otherwise, the virus of “unforgiveness,”
which can kill the spirit, infects and sickens our lives.
This sickness causes hearts to shrivel up and slowly die,
and results from the virus of anger hugged tight to one’s heart,
and resentment that then takes root and poisons the soul.

Medical experts during this time of a pandemic advise that the air in enclosed spaces be well circulated, otherwise the aerosol of the coronavirus can hang around in stale air to be inhaled.

The fresh, life-giving air of forgiveness causes a healthy circulation,
which carries away the deadly aerosols of hatred, resentment, bitterness, and revenge.
Forgiveness carries away this poisonous air, so we might breathe more deeply of God’s merciful love and not be infected with the virus of unforgiveness nor infect others.

That’s why the prayer Jesus taught us to pray, the “Our Father,” is prayed at every Mass.
We go to the Father of mercy with the words of His Son, crying out,
“forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”
As we recognize how God in Christ has given us a gift we cannot repay,
forgiving our sins and saving us from eternal death, we can then forgive others.

One translation of the “Our Father” reads,
“Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.”
Knowing we are forgiven a debt we can never repay, we can, with the Lord’s help,
forgive the “debts” of others, releasing them from the hurt they have inflicted upon us.

Only when we forgive can we utter the words of the Our Father without hypocrisy.

We have all heard the adage, *“forgive and forget.”*
But that is not only not possible—we always remember the hurts done to us—
it is also not how forgiveness works.
Rather, we are to *“remember and forgive.”*
We are to remember who we are and to whom we belong in order to forgive.

Baptism has made us children of the same Father and brother to the same Jesus. By the power of the Spirit poured into our lives at baptism, we are strengthened to live with all people as children of the same Father and siblings to the same Jesus. By baptism, we are the Lord's, we belong to Him, he has authority over our lives.

We are not directors of our own destiny nor fashioners of our own future. We are not masters of ourselves and our lives, but servants of the Risen Lord who gave his Spirit to us, as he did to the first followers, to share forgiveness. *(John 20:23)*

When we remember to whom we belong, who has set us free from the crushing burden of sin and death, then we can share, without counting the cost, the gift of forgiveness. Since we are the Lord's, we do as he does and love as he loves, because he lives and loves through us by the gift of His Spirit.

Otherwise, when we forget who we are and to whom we belong, we allow the hurts done unto us to define our lives. We live our days as the "victim", forever imprisoned in the past. Forgiveness gifts us with a future full of hope and a present packed with possibilities.

The paradox of faith is that if we want to keep what we have been given, we have to give it away.

If we want to be enlivened daily by the Lord's forgiveness, then we have to give that gift of forgiveness away. If we want to have abundant life, then we have to lose our lives through sacrificial love, doing what we ought for the good of the other.

Then we can be sent forth from this miracle of God's mercy called the Mass to announce the Gospel of the Lord.

Fr. Joseph A. Jacobi