

24A 2017 SML  
MT 18:15-20

Forgiveness is a theme that pervades the entire Gospel:

- ✓ the Sermon on the Mount
- ✓ the woman caught in adultery
- ✓ Zacchaeus
- ✓ the prodigal son
- ✓ the lost coin
- ✓ the lost sheep
- ✓ last Sunday's gospel of reproofing one's brother
- ✓ Our Blessed Lord's words from the cross, "Father forgive them . . . "
- ✓ The list goes on.

That is because the point of the Gospel is to live with our inner peace intact, and without forgiveness, all you have is vengeance, retaliation, and what you owe me, stuff that can suck the inner peace right out of you.

This Sunday's Gospel of the unforgiving servant ties in well with the fifth petition in the Lord's Prayer: forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. The fifth petition in the Lord's Prayer summarizes this morning's/evening's gospel in a nutshell.

Notice in the Lord's prayer, the petition "give," "give us this day . . ." precedes the petition "forgive." Why? Because it is as if God's grace in giving to us allows us to see:

the enormous debt we owe,  
all we have done,  
and all we have failed to do,  
sins of commission,  
sins of omission,

that is a debt that threatens to crush the life out of us, and leads us from give to forgive, "Forgive us our debts."

This fifth petition is a prayer taught to us by Our Blessed Lord. It's His idea, not ours. Our idea is an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But Our Blessed Lord's idea is forgive, because God loves to forgive. He:

- ✓ Yearns to forgive
- ✓ Aches to forgive
- ✓ Rushes to forgive, like the loving father rushing to the prodigal son.

At the very heart of God is His desire to give and forgive.

Yet we are faced with a practical dilemma. "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." It is a conditional request. We are forgiven as we forgive. And it's

the only petition where Jesus feels compelled to explain. “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (MT 6:14-15)

Why? Not because God begrudges forgiveness, nor that it’s hard to get forgiveness. It’s simply by the very nature of the created order that we must give in order to receive. I cannot, for instance, receive love, if I do not give love. If people try to love someone and that someone is filled with resentment and vindictiveness, if my fist is clenched, then I cannot hold anything.

But once I give love, I can receive love. Once my hand is open, I can receive. As St. Augustine says, “God gives where He finds empty hands.”

As long as my cry is for vengeance, there can be no reconciliation. If our hearts are so narrow as to only see:

- ✓ how others have hurt or offended,
- ✓ if we are always calculating in our hearts,
- ✓ this one,
- ✓ and that one,

there’s no room for forgiveness.

An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth was the Old Testament's way, man's way of exacting justice. But if my eye saw better than your eye, if my ox is worth more than your ox, there's no end to exacting justice. What ends this vicious cycle is forgiveness. It's God's idea, not man's.

So what's forgiveness?

- ✓ Forgiveness doesn't mean we will cease to hurt. Because it does hurt.
- ✓ Forgiveness doesn't mean we will forget. 9/11's popular slogan, "We will never forget" does not mean we will never forgive.
- ✓ Forgiveness is not pretending the offense did not really matter, because it did matter. It mattered deeply.
- ✓ Forgiveness is not acting like things are the same before the offense. Because things are different.

What is forgiveness? Forgiveness in the Christian sense does not even demand an apology. Forgiveness in the Christian sense means you owe me nothing, because I have given you and it, your offense against me - to God.

I love the prayer that begins O God, in Whom perfect justice and infinite mercy meet . . .

I remember talking to Father Carlos about someone, and I cannot remember what the person even did, but I remember

saying, “Carlos, that guy is going to burn twice as long in hell and we’re going to pray for that.” And we laughed. And anytime someone did something wrong, we used to say, “That guy is going to burn twice as long in hell, and we’re going to pray for that.” Funny, but that’s not the prayer.

A better prayer is to give the person and the offense to God. And it shouldn’t be hard. Here’s why.

Let’s say student A did something wrong to student B. And student A’s dad came to see me. And I assured the Dad, “I will take care of it.”

Do I need to tell him what I’m going to do? No.

Do I even need to get back to him? No.

Because I said I would take care of it.

That’s the point of forgiveness. To say the person, “you don’t owe me anything, not even an apology,” because I have given you and it to God, in Whom perfect justice and infinite mercy meet, and God will take care of it. From give to forgive. With God, with forgiveness, my inner peace is intact.