

Mt 18:21-35; Sir 27:30-18:7; Rom 14:7-9 Forgiving from our Heart

There once was a king who declared he would give his daughter in marriage or a million dollars to the brave man who could swim across a pool filled with crocodiles unharmed.

Almost immediately there was a big splash. Everyone saw one guy swim really fast, in a matter of seconds, across the pool unharmed.

The king asked, “what do you want my daughter or a million dollars?” The young man said, “listen I’m not interested in your daughter or the money. I just want to know who pushed me into the pool!”

We find it so difficult to forgive. But Jesus says we must forgive, *not seven times but seventy-seven times* (Mt 18:22). That means there is no limit.

And why should we do it? Because our salvation depends on it.

Of course that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t protect ourselves and our family. It doesn’t mean we shouldn’t seek justice.

What it does mean is even when we don’t feel like loving our enemies, we must find a way to love them like Jesus loves them. (Maybe pray for their conversion so that they might save their souls.)

Jesus will help us. He showed us how in a parable.

A king’s servant owes the king so much money he can’t possibly pay it back. In a similar way, when we sin against God, we can’t possibly pay Him back.

The king’s servant begs for mercy. And moved with compassion, the king forgives the debt. It’s like God’s unlimited mercy for us: All is forgiven!

No matter how great the sin...no matter how often we commit the sin, that is Gods’ response to our plea for mercy: All is forgiven.

But the story continues. The king’s servant comes upon a fellow servant who owes him a much smaller amount. But when he begs for mercy, the king’s servant chokes him and throws him into prison.

When the king hears about it, he says: *Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant, as I had pity on you?* (Mt 18:33). He reverses his forgiveness and throws him into prison.

The message is quite clear. God's love for us is eternal. His mercy for us has no limits. And Jesus empowers us with that love and mercy when our sins are forgiven.

Should we not share that gift of love and mercy by forgiving anyone who offends us? Yes. And we must do it from our heart.

Otherwise...and this is really scary...God will revoke His forgiveness. In other words, when a priest grants us absolution in the confessional...its not over yet.

Because like we pray in the Our Father: *Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.*

And like the first reading says, *Forgive your neighbor's injustice; then when you pray, your own sins will be forgiven* (Sir 28:2).

In other words, if we want to be forgiven...and stay forgiven...we've got to forgive others the way God has forgiven us.

What then, can we do? Jesus said, we must forgive from our heart.

Jesus will help us: When we receive Holy Communion our venial sins are forgiven, and Jesus comes to abide inside our heart.

When we go to confession our mortal sins are forgiven, and Jesus once again comes to abide inside our heart.

With Jesus in us, we can forgive from our heart. Because forgiving from our heart is like the sacrifice of the cross.

It is a sacrifice because we are reluctant to forgive. It makes us feel weak and vulnerable, like a punching bag, like we will lose our dignity and self-respect.

It must come from our heart. We must make the decision--out of love for God--not to take any action and give up our right for revenge.

Why? Like the second reading says, because we live and die...not for ourselves, but for God (Rom 14:7-8).

And so, we must do our best to forgive...by imitating Jesus and making His sacrifice our own. Because His words, His heart and His spirit are already inside of us.

Maybe pray: Lord, give me your forgiving spirit while in agony in the garden. You knew all those people you healed, cared for, loved and forgave would betray you—and it hurt you to the core:

*My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not as I will, but as you will* (Mt 26:39).

Lord, give me your forgiving spirit while you suffered and died on that cross...betrayed, denied, forsaken, abandoned and nailed to that cross by the sins of those you love so much—and it hurt you to the core.

Yet you forgave us: *Father, forgive them, [for] they know not what they do* (Lk 23:34).

Because in that moment, *the veil of the temple [that separated us from God] was torn [from top to bottom]* (Lk 23:45)...

And when Jesus breathed His last, he cried out: *Father, into your hands I commend my spirit* (Lk 23:46). He handed over the spirit...to whom...into us!

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, give us the grace to forgive from our hearts with You inside of us.

Because forgiving from our hearts is forgiving from that cross...Your cross of sacrifice...and our cross of sacrifice...for God, for us and for the whole human race.