

Take a moment and think of somebody. Someone whose name, when it crosses your mind, makes your stomach tighten a little. It could be a relative, a coworker, someone from this parish, maybe a public figure. Whoever it is, picture them standing in front of you, because today's readings are about that person.

Sirach doesn't soften it: anger and wrath are ugly things, and the sinner clings to both. The one who nurses a grudge and then asks God for healing is asking for a contradiction. Every time we pray “forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us,” we make that same claim about ourselves out loud.

The Psalmist answers back: the Lord is slow to anger, abounding in kindness, and does not repay us as our sins deserve. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions. That's the God we meet in Confession: not a scorekeeper, but a Father who tears up the scorebook. And if that's who God is toward us, that's the shape our own hearts are meant to take.

Which brings us to Peter. He offers to forgive seven times, thinking he's being generous or heroic, even. Jesus responds, *nope, seventy-seven times*---and he's not giving Peter a bigger number to count. He's throwing out keeping score altogether. Then Jesus shares a parable: a servant forgiven a debt he could never repay in ten lifetimes turns around and chokes a fellow servant over pocket change. We cringe because the servant is so obviously wrong, but the story isn't about him. It's about us, every time we treat our grievances as bigger than the mountain of sin God has already forgiven in us.

Notice the king's question: not *how could you be so unfair*, but *I had mercy on you--- shouldn't you have had mercy too?* Mercy received is meant to become mercy given. That's what grace does inside a heart that receives it: the same grace we receive at every Eucharist, meant to move from that altar into our ordinary grudges.

Paul ties it together: none of us lives or dies for ourselves, because we belong to the Lord. The person who wronged you belongs to Jesus too, not to your judgment. Holding onto anger and resentment is, to quote Bert Ghezzi, “like a poison we carry around inside us with the hope that when we get the chance we can deposit it where it will harm another who has injured us. The fact is that we carry this poison at extreme risk to ourselves.”

We don't have to look far to see how urgent this is. Turn on the news, scroll through a phone, sit at a table with family who vote differently---anger is the water we're all swimming in. Neighbor against neighbor, each side certain the other isn't just wrong but irredeemable. That anger doesn't stay out in the culture; it walks in the door with us every Sunday, and it can divide a parish as easily as a nation.

Jesus isn't asking us to pretend the wounds don't matter, or to stop caring about truth and justice. He's asking us to refuse to let anger have the last word---to see the person in the pew ahead of us, the one whose opinion makes our blood boil, as still our brother or sister, redeemed by the same blood that redeemed us. That doesn't happen because our political situation settles down. It happens because we keep coming back to Jesus for forgiveness so we can become people capable of forgiving.

So: about that person you imagined at the start. Forgiveness isn't amnesia. It doesn't mean the hurt was small, or that trust returns automatically. What Jesus asks is smaller: stop being the jailer. Let the debt go, even if they never ask, even if they never know. Because as long as you hold the ledger, you're the one in the cell.

So, the next time we go to Confession, and receive the Eucharist, let's ask for the grace to let one debt go. That's where this Gospel gets lived.

Amen.