

24th Sunday of the Year – September 13, 2020

Sirach 27: 30 – 28:77 – Romans 14: 7-9 – Matthew 18: 21-35

Like many of you, I suspect, I have been troubled over the years with coming to a good understanding of forgiveness. It is easy to identify with Peter in the Gospel passage we heard as he raises the question of how often we must forgive. Imagine having our own dialogue with God about that neighbor who is a real pest, or a spouse who drives us up a wall, or a boss who just will not let up, or that kid, whether our own or a neighbor's, who tries one's patience to the limit. How often do I have to forgive? There must be a limit. The response: there is no limit. This is to be the case whether or not the person is contrite and asks for forgiveness. The attitude that we must have is not to be revenge in some form, but forgiveness.

In God's speaking to us through the Scripture, we are given three reasons for such an attitude to be considered.

In the Gospel parable that Jesus tells, the reason we are to forgive others comes from our recognition that we all need forgiveness. The failure of the first servant mentioned is that he refused to extend the same forgiveness he had received. Both of the servants had failed to repay what they owed. But the one forgiven was unwilling to show this same attitude toward his fellow servant who owed him a debt. Each of us is to recognize that we are to forgive because we ourselves often are in need of forgiveness from God and from

others.

The wise man Sirach offers a second reason for forgiveness. Does one harbor anger against another but expect healing from God? We are to forgive others because the Lord is constantly willing to forgive us. God's mercy and love for us is unquestioned and unlimited. As followers of Jesus Christ, we profess to make his life our own. If this is genuine on our part, then we must show this forgiveness in our lives. Jesus taught us to pray, and we say so often: Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

From Saint Paul we receive a third reason for the attitude of forgiveness. None of us is master of our own life. The Lord is. Each of us is equal before God, equal in our need for God's mercy and forgiveness. We are all servants of the Lord. We are all to appear before God to render an account of our lives. None of us is in the position to judge or condemn another. All of us are to forgive as we trust we will be forgiven.

Clearly, then, forgiveness is to be present and is to be limitless for us as followers of Christ.

The insight into forgiveness that I gained during the past year is that the first step to forgiveness is not to allow ourselves to be controlled by whatever may have happened to us. We may not be able to forget a hurt or a slight or whatever another may have done. But we can begin to forgive if we do not allow whatever it might happen to be to affect and to control how we choose to live and to act, even toward that

particular individual.

In calling us to forgive in this way, Jesus calls on us to reflect genuinely and completely the mercy, the loving-kindness, the forgiveness of our good and gracious God.