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September 12, 2020

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“Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant as I had pity on you?” (Matt 18:33).

### **Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

*Sir 27:30-28:7; Ps 103; Rom 14:7-9; Matt 18:21-25*

Peter asked Jesus how many times he should forgive. Many others ask simply, “Why should I forgive at all?” If the primal instinct driving human life is survival, why should I give anyone who offends me a chance to do it again? Jesus’ Parable of the Unforgiving Servant is in fact the greatest advice ever given on how to survive as a human being in our competitive and divided world. The loutish unforgiving servant missed a chance to climb out the shark tank he’s been living in and into the freedom of a world defined by mercy.

Peter’s question was on behalf of all the disciples, and he shapes it in the most generous terms he can imagine, open to forgiving even seven times. Jesus instead opens Peter to God’s limitless mercy, telling him to forgive seventy times seven. The parable is about what this could look like in human terms. One servant is forgiven a huge loan, impossible to repay, sparing him prison and the selling of his own family against the amount. But his relief at being forgiven is short-lived, for when he encounters a fellow servant who owes him a small debt, he throttles him and threatens him with the same penalty he has just escaped until he pays up. His meanness quickly comes full circle and he ends up being tortured in a prison of his own making. It could have been much different.

The key to mercy is gratitude. Once we realize that our very existence is a gift and that every opportunity we have received in our lives is a grace, we ought to pay it forward every chance we get. God's name is Mercy, and the greatest blessing we can know is to be like God, generous to a fault and free to love even our enemies and our competitors. If we empty ourselves as we go, we will never lack a full heart and an honorable name. This is the model Jesus offers.

The inability to forgive is an off road into a world of scorekeeping and perdition, like the *Cosa Nostra* Pope Francis condemned in Sicily for its network of blackmail and threats, favors and punishments to holds its members in perpetual subservience. Once in, there is no way out, a contract with hell only conversion at the risk of your life can cancel. What does it benefit to gain the whole world at the cost of your soul? Jesus warns anyone seeking wealth and power that this is a this dangerous game with no winners.

Jesus' parable is an antidote to a world of walls and fear mongering that turns brothers and sisters into invaders and enemies. He offers a path forward that transforms political opponents into fellow citizens, diversity into strength and differences into an invitation to dialogue. The choice is ours between chaos and community.

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