

XXII Trinity 2025

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

Philippians 1.3-8 St. Matthew 18.21-35

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What did Jesus mean when He said that we should forgive others seventy times seven? Jesus is responding to Peter's question, "Lord, if my brother keeps sinning against me, how many times should I forgive him? Seven times?"

The Jewish rabbis at the time taught it was unnecessary to forgive someone more than three times. Their teaching was a misinterpretation of the Old Testament Prophet Amos, where God lists a series of sins committed by various nations and announces their punishment.

Peter would have been familiar with the passage from Amos and thought he was being particularly generous when he asked Jesus if forgiving someone seven times was sufficient. The disciples must have been shocked when Jesus said we must forgive someone seventy times seven...490 times. Jesus was not limiting forgiveness to 490 times. To make his point, he goes on to tell the story of the ungrateful worker, and it is a story about the Kingdom of Heaven.

The king in the virtual story has decided to check on his worker's accounts. One man owes the king 10,000 talents and is told to pay up...or he and his entire family would be sold into slavery to pay the debt. Just how much money is 10,000 talents? It's difficult to assign a precise value to this amount of money in today's dollars. One talent was equivalent to 20 years wages. The man owed the king 200,000 years ages...many billions of dollars...a debt he could not possibly pay no matter how hard he tried.

Our virtual king then does something totally unexpected. He felt sorry for the guy and instead of giving him more time to pay off the debt he writes it off as a bad debt that he knew could never be repaid. The man, happy to be freed from his debt, can now start life over again. What happened next gives the story a not so happy ending.

On his way home the man meets a co-worker who owes him just a few dollars. He doesn't even give his co-worker a chance to say anything. He starts beating him up and has him thrown in jail when he begs for more time to pay back the few dollars he owes. When the king finds out what has happened, he calls the man worthless. He showed mercy

to the man who owed billions of dollars; couldn't he have shown the same mercy toward a co-worker who owed just a few dollars. The ungrateful worker had his debt reinstated and was sent off to jail...a life sentence without parole since he could never repay the original debt.

What do we learn from the story of the ungrateful worker? The virtual king in the story did not take back his forgiveness from the ungrateful worker...the ungrateful worker rejected it. The king expected he show the same compassion toward his fellow worker the king had shown him. While God does not take back his love and compassion for us... we can reject them.

The Story of the Ungrateful Servant teaches us that God's forgiveness of our sins is of enormous magnitude...through his death on the cross Jesus forgave a debt we could not possibly have repaid. In his book *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis wrote, *"To be Christian means to forgive the inexcusable...because God has forgiven the inexcusable in us."*

God's forgiveness...his love and compassion for us...should motivate us into showing the same forgiveness, love and compassion toward people who have hurt us. When we refuse to forgive someone who has hurt us... we place ourselves in an emotional and spiritual prison that can lead us to anger, resentment and even hatred.

C.S. Lewis also wrote, *"Everyone says that forgiveness is a lovely idea until he has something to forgive yet tasted one of the most sublime enjoyments of life."* The disciples asked Jesus to teach us to pray...he said to pray..."Our Father in Heaven...forgive us for the times we have hurt you, as we forgive those who have hurt us." Lewis goes on to say, *"There is no slightest suggestion that we are offered forgiveness on any other terms. It is made perfectly clear that if we do not forgive we shall not be forgiven."*

Forgiving someone who has hurt us deeply isn't always easy. We often want to hold back forgiveness because we are still angry with them and think they don't deserve our forgiveness. Letting go of that anger is the first step toward forgiving someone who has hurt us, even when they refuse to acknowledge they have done anything wrong.

We must always be ready to forgive others...even if it's the 491st time!

