

**The Parable of the Merciless Servant
(24th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A)**

Sirach 27:30-28:7—Forgive Your Neighbor’s Injustice

1. Vengeance: “He that takes vengeance will suffer vengeance from the Lord”
2. Forgiveness: “Forgive your neighbor the wrong he has done”
3. Pardon: “then your sins will be pardoned when you pray.”
4. Anger: How can you harbor “anger” yet seek “healing from the Lord?”
5. Final Judgment: “Remember the end of your life, and cease from enmity...”

Psalm 103—The Lord is Kind and Merciful, Slow to Anger, Compassionate

1. How far does God remove our sins? “As far as the east is from the west” (v. 12)

Romans 14:7-9—Whether We Live or Die, we are the Lord’s

Matthew 18:21-35—Forgiving 490 Times, Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

1. Peter to Jesus: How many times should I forgive?
 - a. 7 X = 7 Times (cf. Gen 4:24)
 - b. 70 X 7 = 490 Times (cf. Dan 9:24-27)
2. Parable of the Unforgiving Servant
 - a. King: “settle accounts with his servants”
 - b. Forgiven Servant: owed “10,000 talents” (1 talent = 6,000 denarii)
 - c. Man’s debt: = 200,000 years wages! (*Impossible* to repay)
 - d. Unforgiven Servant: owed “100 denarii” (= 100 days wages!)
 - e. Other Servants: report to the King what has happened
 - f. Rebuke: “I forgave you all that debt”; “I had mercy on you”
 - g. Model: “Should you not have had mercy (*eleeō*) on your fellow servant...?”
 - h. Result: the king delivers him to “prison,” until he pays “all his debt”
3. “*So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you... if you do not forgive*”

Pope Francis and the *Catechism* on Mercy and Forgiveness

This parable contains a profound teaching for all of us... In short, *we are called to show mercy because mercy has first been shown to us...* For us Christians it is an imperative from which we cannot excuse ourselves. At times how hard it seems to forgive! *And yet pardon is the instrument placed into our fragile hands to attain serenity of heart.* To let go of anger, wrath, violence, and revenge are necessary conditions to living joyfully... (Pope Francis, *The Face of Mercy*, no. 9)

The parable of the merciless servant, which crowns the Lord’s teaching on ecclesial communion, ends with these words: “So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.” It is there, in fact, “in the depths of the *heart*,” that everything is bound and loosed. *It is not in our power not to feel or to*

forget an offense; but the heart that offers itself to the Holy Spirit turns injury into compassion and purifies the memory in transforming the hurt into intercession. (CCC 2843)

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (24th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A)

1. What do you think of the reading from Sirach 27-28 regarding vengeance and forgiveness? Why do you think Sirach puts so much emphasis on keeping the end of our own life in mind when we are tempted to anger and vengeance?

2. Do you sympathize with Peter’s question: “How many times must I forgive?” Does Jesus’ answer to the question challenge you? What are some practical ways we can live out the radical command to mercy that Jesus calls us to? Before answering, read CCC 2842-43 on mercy and forgiveness.

3. Does the message of the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant challenge you? Is there someone in your own life toward whom you need to show mercy and forgiveness? If you choose not forgive, what does Jesus say will be the result? What is the spiritual “prison” into which he speaks of being cast?

For Further Study

1. Pope Francis, *The Face of Mercy*, Bull of Indiction *Misericordiae Vultus* (April 11, 2015), available at www.vatican.va. An amazing meditation on the mercy at the heart of Jesus teaching. A must read for all Christians.
2. Pope Francis, *The Name of God is Mercy* (New York: Random House, 2016). A readable conversation with Pope Francis about Mercy. Extremely inspiring.
3. Curtis Mitch and Edward Sri. *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 233-36. Excellent discussion of the meaning of the “talents” and “denari” in the Parable.