

Tuesday of the Third Week of Lent

Gospel text (Mt 18:21-35): Peter approached Jesus and asked him, “Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus answered, “I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times.

That is why the Kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king who decided to settle accounts with his servants. When he began the accounting, a debtor was brought before him who owed him a huge amount. Since he had no way of paying it back, his master ordered him to be sold, along with his wife, his children, and all his property, in payment of the debt. At that, the servant fell down, did him homage, and said, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back in full.’ Moved with compassion the master of that servant let him go and forgave him the loan.

When that servant had left, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a much smaller amount. He seized him and started to choke him, demanding, ‘Pay back what you owe.’ Falling to his knees, his fellow servant begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.’ But he refused. Instead, he had him put in prison until he paid back the debt. Now when his fellow servants saw what had happened, they were deeply disturbed, and went to their master and reported the whole affair. His master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you your entire debt because you begged me to. Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant, as I had pity on you?’ Then in anger his master handed him over to the torturers until he should pay back the whole debt. So will my heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives your brother from your heart.”

“Moved with compassion the master of that servant let him go and forgave him the loan.”

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Today, Matthew's Gospel invites us to ponder over the mystery of forgiveness by proposing a parallel between God's ways and our own human behavior when it comes to forgiving others.

Man even dares measuring and keeping control of the magnanimity of his forgiving nature: “Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him? As many as seven times?” (Mt 18:21). Peter felt seven times was a bit too much, perhaps the very maximum we can stand. In fact, Peter comes out of it quite splendidly if compared to the official of the parable who, when he met one of his companions who owed him a hundred pieces of silver, “grabbed him by the neck and almost strangled him, shouting, ‘Pay back what you owe.’” (Mt 18:28), refusing to listen to his pleading and promises of payment.

In actual fact, man either refuses to forgive or miserly measures out his forgiveness. Who would actually say that we have just received from God an infinitely reiterated and limitless forgiveness...? The parable says: “Moved with compassion the master of that servant let him go and forgave him the loan.” (Mt 18:27). And this, despite the fact his debt was very big.

But the parable we are commenting on emphasizes God's ways when it comes to granting forgiveness. After calling the debtor's attention to the gravity of his situation, he suddenly took pity on him before his humble and sorrowful pleading: “(...) the servant fell down, did him homage, and said, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back in full.’ Moved with compassion the master...” (Mt 18:26-27). This episode reflects what each one of us knows by our own experience and with deep gratitude: that God forgives the repentant and converted one without any limit. The negative and sad ending of the parable, however, honors justice and evidences the truth of Jesus' words in Luke's Gospel: “For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you.”

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

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“He who forgives and he who is forgiven encounter one another at an essential point, namely the dignity.” (Saint John Paul II)

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“Pardon is the instrument placed into our fragile hands to attain serenity of heart.” (Francis)

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“There is no offense, however serious, that the Church cannot forgive. There is no one, however wicked and guilty, who may not confidently hope for forgiveness, provided his repentance is honest. Christ who died for all men desires that in his Church the gates of forgiveness should always be open to anyone who turns away from sin (Cf. Mt 18:21-22).” (Catechism Of The Catholic Church, N° 982)