

Tuesday 3rd of Lent

Gospel text (Mt 18,21-35): Peter asked Jesus, «Lord, how many times must I forgive the offenses of my brother or sister? Seven times?». Jesus answered, «No, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

»This story throws light on the kingdom of heaven. A king decided to settle the accounts of his servants. Among the first was one who owed him ten thousand gold ingots. As the man could not repay the debt, the king commanded that he be sold as a slave with his wife, children and all his goods in payment. The official threw himself at the feet of the king and said, ‘Give me time, and I will pay you back everything’. The king took pity on him and not only set him free but even canceled his debt.

»This official then left the king's presence and he met one of his companions who owed him a hundred pieces of silver. He grabbed him by the neck and almost strangled him, shouting, ‘Pay me what you owe me!’. His companion threw himself at his feet and asked him, ‘Give me time, and I will pay everything’. The other did not agree, but sent him to prison until he had paid all his debt. His companions saw what happened. They were indignant and so they went and reported everything to their lord. Then the lord summoned his official and said, ‘Wicked servant, I forgave you all that you owed when you begged me to do so. Weren't you bound to have pity on your companion as I had pity on you?’. The lord was now angry, so he handed his servant over to be punished, until he had paid his whole debt». Jesus added, «So will my heavenly Father do with you unless each of you sincerely for-give your brother or sister».

«The king took pity on him and not only set him free but even canceled his debt»

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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, how many times must I forgive the offenses of my brother or sister? 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 me 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: «The king took pity on him and not only set him free but even canceled his debt» (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: «(...) he threw himself at the feet of the king and said, ‘Give me time, and I will pay you back everything’. The king took pity...» (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 Lk 6:38: «For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you».