Thursday of the Nineteenth Week in Ordinary Time

Gospel text (*Mt* 18:21—19:1): 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 the fellow servant 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 his brother from his heart.”

When Jesus finished these words, he left Galilee and went to the district of Judea across the Jordan.

“Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him?”

Fr. Joan BLADÉ i Piñol
(Barcelona, Spain)

Today, the question “if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him?” (Mt 18:21) might sound like this: —These people I love so much… I also see their quirks and annoying habits. They frustrate me constantly, they ignore me, they act selfishly. And it’s not just once—it’s day after day. Lord, how long must I put up with them?

Jesus responds with a lesson in patience. In truth, both debtors in the parable say the same thing: “Be patient with me” (Mt 18:26,29). Yet while the merciless servant’s impulsive cruelty—choking a fellow servant over a small debt—leads to his moral and economic ruin, the king’s patience not only spares the debtor, his family, and his possessions, but also elevates the king’s character and wins him the trust of his court. The king’s reaction, as told by Jesus, echoes the words of the psalmist: “But with you is forgiveness and so you are revered” (Ps 130:4).

Of course, we must stand against injustice—and if necessary, do so with strength (to passively tolerate evil may reveal apathy or cowardice). But righteous anger is only healthy when it is free of selfishness, rage, or foolishness, and instead comes from a sincere desire to defend the truth. True Christian patience is what allows us to endure, with mercy, the contradictions, weaknesses, irritations, and untimely demands of people, situations, or things. To be patient is to master oneself. Those who are easily offended or quick tempered cannot be patient, because they lack reflection and self-control.

Patience is a Christian virtue because it is part of the very message of the Kingdom of Heaven. It is shaped by the experience that we all have faults. As St. Paul exhorts us to “bear with one another” (cf. Col 3:12–13), St. Peter reminds us that “the Lord’s patience is our opportunity for salvation” (cf. 2 Pet 3:15).

And truly, how many times has the good Lord forgiven us in the confessional? Seven times? Seventy-seven times? Perhaps even more!

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “If you are looking for an example of patience, you will find the best of them in the Cross. Great was the patience of Christ on the cross” (Saint Thomas Aquinas)

- “The Lord takes his time. But even He, in this relationship with us, has a lot of patience. And he awaits us until the end of life! Let us think of the good thief, who, right at the end, recognized God” (Francisco)

- "Hence the laity … are marvelously called and prepared so that even richer fruits of the Spirit may be produced in them. For all their works, prayers, and apostolic undertakings, family and married life, daily work, relaxation of mind and body, if they are accomplished in the Spirit - indeed even the hardships of

life if patiently born - all these become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. In the celebration of the Eucharist these may most fittingly be offered to the Father along with the body of the Lord" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, nº 901)