

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
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Today, asking “if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him?” (Mt 18:21), may mean: —These persons I love so much have their little ways and whims that bother me; day after day, they pester me every five minutes; they do not speak to me... Lord, how long am I supposed to put up with them?

And Jesus answers with the lesson of patience. Actually, both colleagues coincide when they say: “Be patient” (Mt 18:26-29). But, while the intemperance of the wicked one, strangling his companion for a few silver coins, provokes his moral and economic ruin, the king's patience, while saving the debtor, his family and his goods, magnifies the monarch's personality and generates the confidence of his court. The king's reaction in Jesus' words reminds us of the Psalm: “But with you is forgiveness and so you are revered” (Ps 130:4).

It is clear we have to oppose injustice, even passionately (otherwise it would be a sign of apathy or cowardice). But indignation is healthy only when there is no selfishness, nor wrath, nor any nonsense, except our honest desire to fight for the truth. Authentic patience allows us to mercifully tolerate contradiction, weakness, inconveniences and unreasonable persons or events. To be patient is tantamount to self-control. Susceptible or violent persons cannot be patient because they neither take their time to reflect matters nor to control themselves.

Patience is a Christian virtue because it is a part of the message from the Kingdom of Heaven, and it is forged on the experience that we all have defects. If Paul exhorts us to put on a heart of patience with one another (cf. Col 3:12-13), Peter reminds us that the Lord's patience offers us the chance of salvation (cf. 2Pet 3:15).

For, how many times has God's patience forgiven us in the confessional? Seven times? Seventy-seven times? Maybe more!

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

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“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)

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“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)

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"Hence the laity ... are marvelously called and prepared so that even richer fruits of the Spirit maybe 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, n° 901)