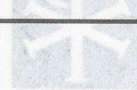


Sirach 27:30–28:7

Psalm 103:1-2, 3-4,
9-10, 11-12

Romans 14:7-9

Matthew 18:21-35



Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 17, 2023



REFLECTION

The number seventy-seven, given in today's Gospel as the number of times we are to forgive someone, is not meant to be taken literally . . . otherwise that seventy-eighth time the same person asked for forgiveness would be a problem! Instead, Jesus uses these numbers to illustrate the need to always offer forgiveness and to ask for forgiveness.

It seems like a nice idea until you stop and think about people you know who continuously make poor decisions. We can also think of our own bad decisions that we might repeat. Jesus reminds us that God's love and forgiveness does not run out. We should still protect ourselves and can feel hurt and anger, but forgiveness helps us move beyond these and act like Christ. Forgiveness a challenging Christian value to practice but also one of the most worthwhile.



ACTION

In June 2015, nine members of church in South Carolina were shot and killed during a Bible study. One of the most remarkable reactions of this terrible event was how quickly and genuinely the victim's families were able to forgive the shooter. This week your action challenge is to find a story of forgiveness in the news and post it to a social media account or talk about it with friends and family.



Read about radical forgiveness: <https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Society/2015/0620/Charleston-Victims-families-tell-alleged-shooter-Dylann-Roof-We-forgive-you>

QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ How can you strengthen your relationship with God so that you are able to forgive more easily?
- ❖ How might the world be different if there was more forgiveness and less revenge?



September 17, 2023

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LECTIONARY #130A

Sirach 27:30–28:7

Psalm 103:1-2, 3-4, 9-10, 11-12

Romans 14:7-9

Matthew 18:21-35

Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

Leader's Context

Peter asks a question that we've probably all asked before: How many times do I have to forgive this person? To answer Peter, Jesus tells him a story of a king forgiving a debt, yet the person whose debt was forgiven does not show the same mercy toward others. The first point of this story is to show that forgiveness shouldn't have a limit. The second point we can take away from this is the importance of mercy, compassion, and authenticity in the Christian life.

Q FOCUS: *Without compassion and mercy, one cannot fully love nor forgive.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

On September 17, the Church celebrates St. Hildegard (1098-1178). Named a Doctor of the Church by Pope Benedict XVI in 2012, she was most known for her theological writings. At a young age she started to have heavenly visions but it wasn't until she was older that she recorded them, encouraged by the prompting of her spiritual director and others. Her writings of her mystical visions have been a source of deep spiritual growth for many. She is also well known for composing beautiful music and lyrics. Hildegard is known as the patron saint of musicians and writers.

Church Teaching Connection

"We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace. Our salvation depends on it. Mercy: the word reveals the very mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. Mercy: the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us. Mercy: the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life. Mercy: the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness" (*Misericordiae vultus*, 2).

Hear the Word

Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Matthew 18:21-35

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the sign of the cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

Peter approached Jesus and asked him, "Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive? 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 your brother from your heart."

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

We can imagine that when Peter asked this question of Jesus, he might have been looking for an easy answer like, "Just this many times." Although Jesus gives a number, seventy-seven times, we aren't meant to take it literally so that on the seventy-eighth time someone is out of luck. Rather, Jesus expands his answer and the disciples' understanding of forgiveness by telling them a story that better illustrates what it means to forgive.

► Have you ever asked a question and instead of just being told an answer, you were asked yet another question or were presented with a story?

Sometimes our parents and teachers do this as way of instructing us about what is really important. This is good because it helps us to grow, but I'm sure it is still frustrating sometimes to receive that type of answer! Jesus wants Peter to not just get an answer to his question; he wants to transform Peter's heart to a deeper understanding of what it means to forgive and what purpose forgiveness has in the Christian life.

In the story, a king is moved with pity by a servant's plea to forgive his debt. Perhaps the king had once experienced the grace of forgiveness. He knew the power it had in his own life and at this moment, he chose to extend that grace to someone else. If we know love, we are able to love more fully. If we know kindness, we are more ready to give kindness.

► What have been some of the formative attitudes in your life, from your family, teachers, or catechists?

In this beautiful moment of forgiveness in the Gospel, we hope that the servant is so moved by his own forgiveness that he continues to "pay it forward" with those he interacts with. But as we continue to read, his heart isn't quite ready yet and he does not have mercy on his fellow servant. The master ends up calling the servant back, telling him how he failed and then punishing him for his behavior.

We don't always act with mercy and love toward others. It is challenging, even though God continues to act toward us with those qualities. Deep in our hearts, we all want to love like Jesus does. That desire is what carries us through this Christian life. We have to want to be like Jesus and try every day to love like him, forgive like him, and be graceful with others like he is with us. Forgiving from the heart is at the core of living out our Christian life.

Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the “Church Teaching Connection” on page 30.

God never runs out of mercy for us and we should not run out of mercy for others.

The way of Jesus is one of kindness, humility, and love.

Forgiveness is an essential part of the Christian life.

Act on the Word

Following Christ’s Commands

For this activity, you will need a large empty room or space outside to run around, a list of commands for the leader (see below), and a crucifix.

Jesus gives us the example of how to lead a Christian life. We have to choose to follow his commands and do it to the best of our ability.

Explain to the teens that they will be playing the game “Attention on Deck.” This is like “Simon Says” in that the teens will have to correctly obey the commands of the “captain” (the youth minister) in order to stay in the game. Explain the following commands to the teens and then call them out, one at a time at first and then gradually getting more complex by increasing the speed at which you call different commands. The last teen to remember what the commands are and complete them is out. The person who stays in the longest (by correctly responding to the all the commands given the fastest) is the winner. You can have multiple youth get “out” at once or just one at a time, depending on how large your group is. These are the commands you can use:

- ✳ Port: Run to the left side of the space
- ✳ Starboard: Run to the right side of the space
- ✳ Bow: Run to the front of the space
- ✳ Stern: Run to the back of the space

- ✳ Hit the deck: Lay down on your stomach
- ✳ Attention on deck: Stand up straight, feet together and salute the captain
- ✳ Scrub the deck: Bend down and scrub the floor
- ✳ Turtle: Lay on your back with hands and feet in the air
- ✳ Clear the deck: Sit on the floor without touching the floor with your feet

After the game, lead the youth in this reflection, while having them focus on the crucifix: “To win ‘Attention on Deck,’ you had to hear the commands, learn what they meant, and remember them. This is true for us as Catholics as well. We have to know how to be disciples and then do it. When we focus our attention on Christ, through participation in Mass, prayer, and other spiritual practices, we are better able to remember his commands and model our lives on his.”

Closing Prayer

*Your love, O God, is beyond measure,
your compassion is ever available to the
sincere of heart.*

*Grant that we, your faithful servants,
may always seek your forgiveness
and always be ready to forgive our
brothers and sisters
with the same gracefulness you have
given to us.*

*Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday’s Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at www.ltp.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.