

Homily for the 24th Sunday in Ordinary Times

September 16-17, 2017

Readings: Sirach 27:30 – 28:7; Romans 14: 7 – 9; Matthew 18: 21 – 35

Preacher: Ruth Maier SSJ

God's Word for today presents us with the challenge of forgiveness.

How often do we pray the prayer that Jesus taught us, "... forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us?" Forgiveness is the centerpiece not only of Jesus' teaching, but of his life.

Forgiveness can be a difficult thing for many of us; both to give and to receive. "Wrath and anger are hateful things," says Sirach in the First Reading, "yet the sinner hugs them tight."

And the revenge we seek will come down upon us. We cannot expect God to be merciful to us, if we are not merciful to others. Forgiving another's injustice towards us, is the path to our sins being forgiven. Are we up to the challenge?

To forgive another we must be able to let go of the hurt or the transgression against us. We must put it out of our mind and focus our attention on something else, something other than the hurt we have experienced. In most cases, that's easier said than done. The challenge is to forget how the other has behaved toward us and to focus on the way God loves and forgives us.

Our focus must be on God. For God's mercy is infinite says the Psalmist: "God pardons all your iniquities, heal all your ills." But the measure of God's forgiveness to us is limited only by the measure of our forgiveness to another, says Jesus.

So, asks Peter in the Gospel today, just how far should this forgiveness extend? How often must I forgive? Certainly seven times should be more than enough.

"No," answers Jesus, " not seven times but seventy-seven times." Jesus

does not put a limit on forgiveness. He forgave tax collectors and prostitutes, adulterers and thieves.

So startling was Jesus statement that he followed it immediately with a parable to support his demanding teaching—likening the kingdom to a king who decided to settle his accounts ... as if to say this parable will help you understand the reason for his radical teaching on forgiveness. Forgiveness must be the hallmark of Jesus' disciples.

Jesus expects us to be known by our forgiveness, based on our realization of how much and how often we have been forgiven. God forgives us without reservation or limit. However, if we refuse to forgive another, then this is a sign that we have not accepted it ourselves from God, nor allowed it to enter into our heart to change us.

The inability to forgive, the holding of grudges, the hugging of anger are destructive forces in our family, our neighborhood, our church, our society. It divides us into feuding camps and prevents God's forgiving light in a world darkened by conflict, vengeance, wrath and anger. How many places in our world, in our country are in conflict because of religious, ethnic, tribal, racial, economic or environmental differences. What difference could a gesture or a word of forgiving love play in these situations?

Forgiveness begins with God, but cannot stop there. We are expected to reflect that divine gift in our lives.

Could you find time today or sometime this week to look in to your life to consider:

- Against whom do I hold on tightly to resentment?
- Who have I not forgiven?
- Who is waiting for me to say, "I forgive you?"
- Who have I offended and need to ask forgiveness?
- How many times has God forgiven me?

It is one thing to know what we should do; it is another thing to be able to do it! But this is what Jesus expects of us and he is with us, in our midst to

empower us to forgive from our heart.