

## **OT XXIV (A), Homily, September 13, 2020**

Sirach 27: 30-28: 7; Psalm 103 (The Lord is merciful and gracious; slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love); Romans 14: 7-9; Matthew 18: 21-35.

Our readings for this Twenty-Fourth Sunday concern forgiving those who wound us and being reconciled with them. All three readings today remind us of the path to forgiveness, mercy, and reconciliation and challenge us to walk this, the only Way to Life.

Sirach, in the first reading, reminds his listeners that if they don't heal and forgive and show mercy, they can't expect to receive much of that from God in return. It is unwise to nurse grudges and wise to forgive because our life span is very short and our eternal destiny is decided by how we forgive, how we work for reconciliation with those who offend us and how we render humble and loving service to them.

In today's Psalm, (Ps 103), the Psalmist sings, "The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness." In the second reading, Paul reminds us that we have to forgive others because we belong to Christ who, by his own example in forgiving those who killed Him, taught us how we must forgive in our turn. Since we humans are related to each other as brothers and sisters of Jesus, we are in the family of God, so hatred and bitterness toward anyone should have no place in our hearts.

In today's Gospel, through the parable of the two debtors, Jesus teaches us that there should be no limit to our forgiveness and no conditions attached to our reconciliation. We represent the greater debtor in the parable because we commit sins every day and, hence, we need God's forgiveness every day. But we must forgive in order to be forgiven. Jesus explains, after teaching us the prayer Our Father, "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father also will forgive you. "

Messages: 1) We need to forgive, forget and be reconciled: In the light of eternity and considering the shortness of our span of life, harboring old grudges is pointless. The forgiveness that we offer others is the indispensable condition which opens our hearts to love and makes it possible for us to receive God's forgiveness and to pray meaningfully: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." What God expects from us, and offers us grace to accomplish, is limitless forgiving and a willingness to overlook mistakes and to keep on loving even in the face of insults.

2) We may never forget the hurt we have experienced, but we can, with His ongoing grace, choose to forgive and pray for our offenders. As life goes on and we remember an incident that was hurtful and roused great anger in us, we need to remind ourselves that, with God's grace, we have already forgiven the one that hurt us. Time does heal memories. Forgiveness finally changes us from being prisoners of our past to being liberated and at peace with our memories. Forgiveness allows us to move beyond the pain, the resentment, and the anger. When we forgive, we make the choice that heals. When we withhold forgiveness, we remain the victim. When we offer forgiveness, we are doing it also for our own well-being.