

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time | For Sunday, September 13, 2020

Forgiving from Your Heart

Written by Allison Gingras

Sirach 27:30-28:7

Romans 14:7-9

Matthew 18:21-35



Do you come to God for forgiveness, while your heart holds resentment for another? Do you look to have all your debts forgiven, yet imprison others with your demands against what you feel they owe you? Apart from grace, true forgiveness is impossible. This freely given gift from God allows us to experience true mercy.

“Mercy is deeper and richer than forgiveness. It touches on the transcendent mystery of pure love...Forgiveness is in response to an apology, and there is no measure to it. It must be abundant and from the heart. Forgiveness is a great gift, but there is more. Mercy goes even further than forgiveness because it is unsolicited and undeserved. It is pure grace and gift. Some things are actually unforgivable but are embraced by mercy. Sometimes, mercy is required because the people to be forgiven never asked for it, would not appreciate it, and actually do not deserve it...However, this is not about rights or justice in human terms. It is about mercy.” (McAlear, Richard. OMI, *Forgiveness: Experiencing God's Mercy*, p. 9)

Unmerited, undeserved, sheer grace — how beautiful the gift of God's mercy! Let us begin by exploring more in-depth the idea of a gift. When we receive a present, it is typically considered unearned. Even if someone is offering it to us for some personal accomplishment achieved by our merits, such as a promotion or graduation, it is still the giver's generosity and prerogative to extend the gift. Giving originates from one's charity or obligation and comes in many forms, such as money, a purchased good, time, or even a skill.

Giving is only one side of the equation; the other side of giving is receiving. For a gift to be useful, the recipient must first accept it, and then it must be opened. Gifts need to be utilized in their full designed capacity to reap maximum benefits. In the case of mercy, God freely and abundantly offers it to us, but if we do not accept nor if we do not open our hearts to it, the blessings available remain untapped. Sadly, we miss out on the whole intended purpose of healing and drawing us closer to Him, as well as strengthening us for the challenges of this life. The Good News of the Gospel is the proclamation that God has forgiven us, freely and without reservation. "To receive His mercy, we must admit our faults." (CCC 1847)

God has offered us mercy, but we still need to accept this incredible gift. As we learn in the *Parable of the Unforgiving Servant*, because God is merciful and has forgiven our debt of sin, which we could never pay, we must, in turn, be merciful toward others. Only through God's grace can we forgive one another and do so from the heart. Forgiveness, because it requires dying to ourselves — our pride, our desire to be right, our thirst for revenge — is impossible apart from grace. As Alexander Pope penned, "To err is human, to forgive divine."

Most people have faced situations where they struggle to let go of bitterness, anger, or resentment. Feeling if they forgive this person, then there are no consequences; they let this person "off the hook." However, God reminds us in the Scriptures, "Beloved, do not look for revenge but leave room for the wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'" (Romans 12:19) Knowing this should stir a Christian heart to pray all the more for the offender, that they be blessed and shown mercy, so to be spared this wrath. A perfect and powerful example of loving our neighbor as ourselves.

The *Parable of the Unforgiving Servant* reminds us how imperfect we are, how indebted to God for His outpouring of mercy each person truly is. Recognizing the breadth of all God has forgiven us, the true extent of His love and mercy showered upon us — how could we possibly hold another accountable? God is a just God. Desiring this justice for ourselves, coming before Him as grace beggars, seeking the ability to forgive others from our hearts.

This warning reiterated by Jesus in his words to St. Faustina, "Tell souls not to place within their own hearts obstacles to My mercy, which so greatly wants to act within them. My mercy works in all those hearts which open their doors to it. Both the sinner and the righteous person have need of My mercy. Conversion, as well as perseverance, is a grace of My mercy." (The Diary of St. Faustina, 1577)

Allison Gingras

PRAYER

Merciful Father,
I come to your feet,
to beg for the grace
to forgive my brothers and sisters from my heart.
Grateful for the many offenses you
have forgiven in me,
may I, with your help,
forgive any transgressions against me.
Amen.