

**Mt 18:21-35; Sir 27:30-28:7; Rom 14:7-9 A Forgiving Heart**

**Peter asks Jesus: *Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him? As many as seven times?* (Mt 18:21). That seemed pretty reasonable. The Jewish people believed you only had to forgive someone 3 times.**

**But Jesus turns that upside down: *I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times* (Mt 18:22). That means we should forgive without limits and at all times. And who is your brother? Every person you have ever met, and even those who you have not met yet.**

**To make this teaching perfectly clear, Jesus tells us the parable of the unforgiving servant:**

**The servant owed his master a huge amount of money, which neither he nor his family could afford to pay. He begged for mercy. The master was moved with compassion, and forgave the entire debt.**

**It seems natural that after he received such forgiveness, that he too would show forgiveness to his fellow servant...especially when he only owed him a small amount. But no. Instead, he choked his fellow servant and had him thrown into prison.**

**Does that seem strange? Not really. You see it. I see it. That is the standard of the world.**

**But Jesus turns that standard upside down. He says: *So will my heavenly Father do to you [hand you over to be tortured], unless each of you forgives your brother from your heart* (Mt 18:35).**

**We even confirm that every time we say the Lord's Prayer "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."**

**Do you know what you are saying? You are saying forgive me God only to the extent I forgive others.**

**Have you ever wondered: Why does God want to hold us to such an impossible standard? I think it has to do with love.**

**God wants us to fall so in love with God, that we become like God by imitating Jesus. We were created in the image of God and God wants us to become that image in Jesus.**

**Let me make something perfectly clear. The word “forgive” is one of the most beautiful words you will ever hear. To for-GIVE means to give someone release from the wrong that he or she has done to you. It means to give up your right for vengeance.**

**But it doesn’t mean you have to like them or be friends with them. Sometimes it is best to love someone from a distance and in that way you are a peacemaker.**

**The problem is that forgiving someone is almost impossible. It goes against human nature. And yet, if you can do it, it is your highest achievement.**

**So how can we work together with Jesus Christ to create a forgiving heart in us—a heart we can use to forgive?**

**The first step is this: the more God loves you, the easier it is to forgive. So ask God to let you know how much God loves you.**

**Examine your conscience. Ask yourself: In what ways have I sinned? Then go to confession and beg for Gods’ mercy. Then feel how much God loves you when your sins are forgiven.**

**The second step is this: Once you have received God’s mercy, now you have to give it away. Forgive anyone who offends you. Care for the sick, the poor and the needy.**

**St. Paul tells us in the second reading we should live each day for the Lord. *None of us lives for oneself, and no one dies for oneself. For if we live, we live for the Lord and if we die, we die for the Lord...we are the Lord’s* (Rom 14:7-8).**

**OK. I get that. But when I find myself in the same room with somebody who has offended me, I still feel a burning sensation raging in my heart that says: *an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth!* And even when I ask Jesus to transform me and to take this anger away...it doesn’t go away. So what can I do?**

**The third step is this: in the first reading the Lord says: *remember your last days, set enmity aside; remember death and decay, and cease from sin!* (Sir 28:6).**

**In other words when the feelings of anger and revenge arise...ask yourself: What if today is my last day? Like Thomas Kempis said (*The Imitation of Christ*) you should live each day as if it is the last day of your life.<sup>1</sup>**

**In a book called *Sitio*<sup>2</sup>, Rev.Giuseppe Tomaselli, S.D.B. suggests we should mediate on death in this way:**

**Do you ever think seriously about the fact that you have to die? It will come when you least expect it. So don't kid yourself by saying: "I am still young...I am in good health." Others who have said the same thing are already in eternity.**

**Be prepared. The day will come when it will be said of you: So-and-so is dead. The funeral bell will toll for you...The cemetery awaits you and within a coffin your body will go into dissolution. You have visited the graves of others; now others will come to visit yours.**

**When you go to bed, think that very soon you could die. When the urgings of passion become strong, think immediately: At death, what good will it do me, to have given in to anger and temptation? What good is it to offend God and lose heaven by pleasing this body of death?**

**So let us pray: Lord create in me a forgiving heart. Let me know how much you love me. And give me the wisdom to live each day as if it is last day of my life.**

---

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ, In Four Books*, Ed. Clare L. Fitzpatrick, Catholic Book Publishing Corp. NJ 1992) p 53.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. Giuseppe Tomaselli, S.D.B. *Sitio, Meditations for Priests*, Ed. Very Rev. Raphael M. Huber, O.F.M. Conv. (The Hamilton Printing Co. Rensselaer, N.Y. 1959) p 52-53.