

Forgiving: To Help the Other and Ourselves
Homily for the 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time
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One of the first prayers many of us learn as small children is the Our Father. We pray it every time we participate at Mass. We pray it every time we say the rosary. We recite this beautiful prayer taught us by Jesus himself and the relationships they imply.

Our readings today offer us a glimpse at what it means to forgive. They show us why it is important to give mercy just as we hope to receive mercy.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus uses a parable to speak about our need to forgive one another. In that parable, one servant sees his own debt forgiven but refuses to forgive a smaller debt owed to him. The lesson should be clear for us: since God is so willing to forgive our sins, we should be willing to forgive those who sin against us. The parable shows God's limitless forgiveness. By showing us his forgiveness, God summons us to mirror his mercy. By allowing us to experience love which forgives, God calls us to reflect this kindness to others.

An American author Edith Wharton wrote, "There are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it." In Christian spirituality God is the light which initiates; our role is to respond by being mirrors to others of God's actions to us. In our Christian faith, we are called to be mirrors which reflect God's light of forgiveness. We have been forgiven; this impels us to forgive. This is Jesus' message for us.

The mercy we receive from God is greater by far than the mercy we can extend to our neighbor. Forgiveness is a gift, a grace flowing out of God's love and mercy

In today's first reading—taken from the Book of Sirach—should help us see why offering such forgiveness is helpful to the one forgiving. "Wrath and anger are hateful things, yet the sinner hugs them tight," that reading begins. Have you ever noticed how relieved you can feel when you forgive someone, when you let go of a

grudge? Have you ever noticed how much energy it takes to stay mad at someone? Yet, we still hug tight to wrath and anger because of our pride...and maybe because we have grown accustomed to them.

That reading also asks, "Could anyone nourish anger against another and expect healing from the Lord?" It is not so much that God wants to withhold healing from anyone, but a person nourishing such anger will make himself or herself simply incapable of receiving that healing. St. John Paul II knew that he needed to forgive his attacker in order to receive full healing from the Lord.

I often hear people say that it is difficult to forgive. It certainly is. Forgiveness is a very God-like activity, and it doesn't necessarily come naturally to us as human beings. To forgive means to give up some pride, and it means putting someone else's interests above our own. To forgive even means stepping away from our own way of thinking and imagining the best in someone else, even someone we don't like.

Most of us will never have the opportunity or the need to forgive in such a high-profile way as St. John Paul II did with his attacker. We do, however, have opportunities in our life to forgive others. Who has hurt you today? Or last week? Or last year? The person we forgive benefits from a restored relationship with us, but even more, we benefit from forgiving and not having to carry around such anger and resentment.

The Eucharist we celebrate today is the first sacrament of forgiveness. In it, we acknowledge our debts and through it we receive the Lord's own gift of forgiveness. In the Eucharist, we come to know we are forgiven so we can go out into the world and be generous in loving and forgiving others.