

Sunday Message

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

THE WORD

Year A • 13 September 2026 • Psalter Week 4

TO FORGIVE WITHOUT LIMIT

MATTHEW 18:21-35



Peter asks Jesus how many times he should forgive someone. Jewish tradition said that God forgives three times and punishes on the fourth. Since human beings couldn't be more forgiving than God, forgiveness was, therefore, limited to three times.

Peter must have thought that forgiving someone seven times was more than generous, since it went far beyond what Jewish tradition taught. But Jesus says it's not enough; the Christian must forgive seventy times seven – in other words, never stop forgiving.

Jesus always showed mercy. As Pope Francis put it, the only people Jesus condemns are those who think they don't need it. 'Jesus does not say, "Blessed are those who plot revenge,"' Pope Francis said. 'He calls 'blessed' those who forgive and do so 'seventy times seven.' All of us have been looked upon with divine compassion. If we approach the Lord with sincerity and listen carefully, there may well be times when we hear his reproach: 'Should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?''

In other words, we must forgive because God has forgiven us. We must never stop forgiving. ■

DO

Is there somebody you need to forgive or with whom you need to be reconciled? Perhaps you could seek them out this week.

SAY

'The Lord is compassion and love'

PRAY

For the Christian, there can be no limit to mercy and forgiveness. Pray for the strength to forgive always.

LEARN

Mercy was at the heart of Jesus' ministry.

Forgiveness sets us free.

We must think of ourselves as an army of the forgiven.

REFLECT

What can we Christians say about forgiveness?

1. People are basically good. We have an innate goodness. The creation story in Genesis tells us God saw all that God had made and found it very good. In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis uses a beautiful word to describe God's relationship with creation: All is a caress of God. When we see people as good, then we will treat them differently.
2. God forgives us first. That's the story of salvation. No matter how often God's people strayed, God never gave up on them. As Pope Francis puts it in his memoir *Hope*, we children get up to all kinds of things, we make mistakes, we sin, but when we ask for pardon, God's mercy embraces us and forgives us, always. God never tires of embracing and forgiving us. It is we who sometimes grow tired of asking for pardon. God never tires of forgiving us.
3. In receiving forgiveness, we give the past over to God – and let it go. We all know people who find this hard to do. They keep revisiting past sins. Crucified by scruples, they worry they didn't confess properly last time or didn't include everything. The

scrupulous aren't free. They've been so badly damaged by some event that they've been stuck ever since. Forgiveness sets us free, but not if we can't let go of the past. The challenge is to give the past over to God and live the present in love.

4. In order to live the present in love, we must be able to forgive ourselves. We can find that hard to do, especially if there's something in our past we feel especially guilty about. If I can't forgive myself, it's going to be hard to forgive others. If God can forgive me, then I must forgive myself.
5. Pope Francis described forgiveness as 'a human right. The ability to be forgiven is a human right. We all have the right to be forgiven.' In his letter on marriage and the family, *Amoris laetitia* (The Joy of Love), he says that pastors must 'avoid judgements which do not take into account the complexity of various situations' and must 'be attentive to how people experience distress because of their condition.' All of us have been looked upon with divine compassion, he writes. 'We should hear God saying to us, "Should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?"'

Being compassionate, he continues, doesn't mean watering down church

teaching. Jesus proposed a demanding ideal, but 'never failed to show compassion and closeness to the frailty of individuals like the Samaritan woman or the woman caught in adultery.'

6. Conversion is always a work in progress. Pope Francis had a word for it: gradualism. In *Amoris laetitia*, he says that no one drops down from heaven perfectly formed; 'families need constantly to grow and mature in the ability to love... All of us are called to keep striving towards something greater than ourselves and our families, and every family must feel this constant impulse.'

My true self is something I must keep striving toward, turning from my old life to one like Christ's. My conversion is ongoing. I must work at being a better me, seeking to love more, forgive more, be kinder, more compassionate, more tolerant. I'll never be perfect, but I must keep trying. That's gradualism.

7. Forgiveness sets us free. To forgive is to stop wasting energy on resentment and grudges. In forgiving, I liberate myself to live. As Lewis Smedes put it in *Forgive and Forget*, 'To forgive is to set a prisoner free and to discover that the prisoner was you.' ■

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

*Give peace, O Lord, to those who wait for you,
that your prophets be found true.
Hear the prayers of your servant,
and of your people Israel.*

COLLECT

Look upon us, O God,
Creator and ruler of all things,
and, that we may feel the working of your mercy,
grant that we may serve you with all our heart.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

FIRST READING Sirach 27:30 – 28:7

A reading from the Book of Sirach.
Anger and wrath, these are abominations,
and the sinful man will hold them fast.
The one who seeks vengeance will be paid vengeance from the Lord,
and he who keeps a record will have his own sins recorded.
Forgive your neighbour the wrong he has done,
and then your sins will be pardoned when you pray.
Does one person harbour anger against another
and yet seek for healing from the Lord?
Does he have no mercy towards someone like himself
and yet pray concerning his own sins?
If he himself, being flesh, maintains wrath,
who will make atonement for his sins?
Remember the end of your life and cease from enmity,
remember destruction and death
and be true to the commandments.
Remember the commandments
and do not be angry with your neighbour;
remember the covenant of the Most High
and overlook error.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 103(102):1-2. 3-4. 9-10. 11-12. R. 8

R: *The LORD is compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger and rich in mercy.*

1. Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and all within me, his holy name.
Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and never forget all his benefits. **R.**
2. It is the Lord who forgives all your sins,
who heals every one of your ills,
who redeems your life from the grave,
who crowns you with mercy and compassion. **R.**
3. He will not always find fault;
nor persist in his anger for ever.
He does not treat us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our faults. **R.**
4. For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so strong his mercy for those who fear him.
As far as the east is from the west,
so far from us does he remove our transgressions. **R.**

SECOND READING Romans 14:7-9

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans.

Brothers and sisters: None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we

are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

ACCLAMATION BEFORE THE GOSPEL John 13:34

R: *Alleluia, alleluia.*

A new commandment I give to you, says the Lord,
that you love one another, just as I have loved you.

R: *Alleluia.*

GOSPEL Matthew 18:21-35

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

At that time: Peter came up and said to Jesus, 'Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.'

'Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything." And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, "Pay what you owe." So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you." He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, "You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?" And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.'

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

Look with favour on our supplications, O Lord,
and in your kindness accept these, your servants' offerings,
that what each has offered to the honour of your name
may serve the salvation of all.

Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

How precious is your mercy, O God!

The children of men seek shelter in the shadow of your wings.

Or

*The chalice of blessing that we bless
is a communion in the Blood of Christ;
and the bread that we break
is a sharing in the Body of the Lord.*

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

May the working of this heavenly gift, O Lord, we pray,
take possession of our minds and bodies,
so that its effects, and not our own desires,
may always prevail in us.

Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.