

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

THE RESPONSE TO THE PSALM IS

Ps 103(102):1-2. 3-4. 9-10. 11-12. R8

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

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.

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

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.

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

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.

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

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.

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

A READING FROM THE LETTER 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

THE GOSPEL ACCLAMATION .

John 13:34

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

A READING FROM THE HOLY GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

Gospel

Matthew 18:21-35

‘I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.’

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.’

REFLECTION ON THE READINGS

You probably know about 15,000 -20,000 words and use over 10,000. The bible language of Hebrew only has 3000, Greek probably more. But with 3000 words you adapt, big numbers are not literal but mean many or an unknown number. So, 77 times would mean as many as needed. Every time you must be forgiving as the words of the Our Father reminds us 'as we forgive those who trespass against us.'

Sins have two aspects, the effect on someone else directly or indirectly, suicide causes sadness for those left behind to try to make sense and worry about what they could have done or what could have been done to reduce the suffering and make life bearable.

The second effect is the diminishing of us, the recognition of 'I wish I hadn't done that 'and what sort of person am I becoming, eventually recognising that reconciliation may not ever be possible.

Jesus continues his teaching on reconciliation and positive action. The parable would have resonated with his audience as the king Herod had been re-appointed as King in Galilee by the new Emperor. Herod had probably not passed on the tax revenue he should have collected. Emperors wanted colonies a peace as well as tax revenue and the emperor may have settled for the first with the promise of the second to come in sufficient time. Herod would have got back and started by using his thuggish tax collectors to get as much revenue as soon as they could without any mercy. For Jesus' audience a horrible reminder of the hated ruler and the state of things.

For us the parable can be placed with St Paul's words we live for the Lord. The danger for us being unforgiving is how far we are from God and how bitter we can become stuck in our own self-righteousness. Letting go of our rage and letting God in, requires a level of trust and courage because it may bring no relief. Jesus' message is a tough one, if you do not forgive you are not ready for the kingdom of heaven.