

SEPTEMBER 11, 2011

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME MATTHEW 18:21-35

The Gift of Forgiveness

In the Jewish tradition, the rabbis taught that Jews should forgive those who offended them three times. Peter in trying to be especially generous asked Jesus if seven (the 'perfect' number) was enough times to forgive someone. But Jesus answered, "Seventy times seven"¹—meaning we shouldn't even try to keep track of how many times we forgive someone. We should always forgive those who are truly repentant, no matter how many times they ask.

Innumerable references can be found in the Bible, where God has forgiven His people—David, Solomon, Moses, Israelites and many more. God also bestows on us His gift of forgiveness but in the measure of our own generosity. The Lord's Prayer teaches us, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."² Furthermore, a prerequisite of God's acceptance of the gift of our love depends upon our reconciliation with others. "So if you are standing before the altar in the Temple, offering a sacrifice to God, and suddenly remember that a friend has something against you, leave your gift there beside the altar and go and apologize and be reconciled to him, and then come and offer your sacrifice to God."

Jesus' life on earth reveals His great capacity to forgive. He not only preached forgiveness but also forgave all who came to Him with sincerity. He was even able to forgive from His heart those who put Him to death, praying "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." The realization of how completely Jesus forgives should instill in His followers a free and generous attitude towards others.

Ultimately, forgiveness is a priceless gift we give to ourselves. Bitterness, anger, hurt feelings imprison us emotionally. There is a story told about a former inmate of a Nazi concentration camp who was visiting a friend who shared the ordeal with him.

"Have you forgiven the Nazis?" he asked his friend.

"Yes."

"Well, I haven't. I'm still consumed with hatred for them," the other replied.

"In that case," said his friend gently, "they still have you in prison."

--Sr. Mary Elizabeth Jupe, CDP

For reflection or sharing:

- ▲ How have you freed yourself from an "eye for an eye" mentality?
- ▲ Share an example when forgiveness brought you to true peace.
- ▲ Recall all that you have been forgiven and give thanks.

¹ Matthew 6:9

² Matthew 5:25