



# WEEKLY GOSPEL REFLECTION



## 24<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, CYCLE A

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*"...how often must I forgive?" Jesus answered, "I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times."  
Matt 18:21*

The parable in our Gospel this week is unique to Matthew. Something in human nature seems to make us feel quite deserving of mercy but we often habitually react on what we can call "*first impulse*" in a negative fear-driven way, even if only in our thoughts. This "*first impulse*" rises within us from the primitive survival instinct of "*fight or flight*." When someone "*owes*" us, as is the case in today's parable, our first primitive reaction is "*fight or flight*." The Evil One tempts us to negatively bind what is owed and use it contrary to our Christian imperative to, "*...forgive those who trespass against us*" (see Luke 11:4). The Evil One uses what becomes mortally bound to keep us trapped in a negative spiral of sinful consequences. A careful reading of this parable should show us a far better way to deal with each other.

In the exchange between Peter and Jesus, the number seven appears as a figure of fullness and perfection. The old law required that we forgive only three wrong-doings. Peter feels he is being generous in doubling that number and adding one for good measure. Jesus responds with a number of "forgivenesses" so huge that it means "unlimited." Jesus shows Peter and us by extension, a way to not think as mortals think, but as God thinks (see Matt 16:23).

In the parable, the king is like God, who has the right to demand what we have no hope of paying but in mercy forgives the entire debt. If we think we can treat each other with mercy of a lesser quality, we are sadly mistaken.

It is a better way because it is God's way. Mercy flowing through the Sacred Heart of Jesus is totally forgiving and accepting, often through no merits of our own. The merciful love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ are completely free and pure. Through the action of the Holy Spirit we can achieve a new intentional "*Rule of Life*" for daily living. We can pray, "*Come, Holy Spirit fill my heart with the fire of your love...*" and turn negative "*first impulses*" into a channel of the Mercy of Christ. As we practice this new rule daily, over time we receive grace to live a life of forgiveness and love, even as we are less than perfect in our implementation of this new rule for daily living. Over time, through intentionally living this daily prayer, the deep primitive negative "*first impulse*" transforms into a "*first impulse*" of the desire for love and mercy toward those that have "*trespassed against us*."

For reflection this week, it would be good to daily bring to mind a new "*Rule of Life*" that examines at the end of our day those times when we failed to transform our "*first impulses*." Seek forgiveness from Our Lord, and pray that the Holy Spirit unbinds us from sin, and instructs our mind and heart to remember in every case a "*first impulse*" of mercy.

*"Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you." Luke 11:9*

**A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew**

Peter approached Jesus and asked him,  
"Lord, if my brother sins against me,  
how often must I forgive?  
As many as seven times?"

Jesus answered,  
*"I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times.*

*That is why the kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king  
who decided to settle accounts with his servants.  
When he began the accounting,  
a debtor was brought before him who owed him a huge amount.  
Since he had no way of paying it back,  
his master ordered him to be sold,  
along with his wife, his children, and all his property,  
in payment of the debt.  
At that, the servant fell down, did him homage, and said,  
'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back in full.'  
Moved with compassion the master of that servant  
let him go and forgave him the loan.  
When that servant had left, he found one of his fellow servants  
who owed him a much smaller amount.  
He seized him and started to choke him, demanding,  
'Pay back what you owe.'  
Falling to his knees, his fellow servant begged him,  
'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.'  
But he refused.  
Instead, he had the fellow servant put in prison  
until he paid back the debt.  
Now when his fellow servants saw what had happened,  
they were deeply disturbed, and went to their master  
and reported the whole affair.  
His master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant!  
I forgave you your entire debt because you begged me to.  
Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant,  
as I had pity on you?'  
Then in anger his master handed him over to the torturers  
until he should pay back the whole debt.  
So will my heavenly Father do to you,  
unless each of you forgives your brother from your heart."*

**The Gospel of the Lord**