

The 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year A – 9/13/26 – Msgr. Peter Quang Nguyen

First Reading – Sirach 27:30-28:7: Release anger and forgive others to ensure your own sins are forgiven, recalling death and God's commandments as motivations to cease sinning and live in peace.

Responsorial Psalm – Psalm 103: Celebrate the Lord's generous mercy; He forgives sins, heals, and does not hold grudges, treating us with love far greater than our actions deserve.

Second Reading – Romans 14:7-9: Our lives and deaths are dedicated to the Lord, reflecting Christ's dominion over both the living and the dead, for whom he died and rose.

Gospel – Matthew 18:21-35: Jesus teaches about unlimited forgiveness through a parable where a king forgives a servant's large debt. The servant then harshly demands a small debt from another, leading to his punishment.

My Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The Evangelist Matthew presents a continuous series of Jesus' teachings regarding the mystery of charity in the relationship between God and humanity, and among human beings themselves: God always forgives sinners and takes the initiative to seek their return—illustrated by the image of the shepherd searching for the lost sheep (cf. Mt 18:12-14); people are called to help one another correct their faults humanely and to forgive each other (cf. Mt 18:15-17); and mutual love and forgiveness among people serve as the condition for receiving God's forgiveness (Mt 18:35).

Interpersonal relationships reflect the relationship between humanity and God; the way people forgive one another mirrors the way God forgives them. This is the essence of today's Gospel passage:

1. How many times is enough to forgive?

People often say, "Three strikes and you're out," implying that three times is generally considered the limit for forgiveness. In today's Gospel, Peter goes even further—more than doubling that figure. He adopts the number seven—considered a number of completeness in Jewish tradition—as his benchmark, believing it to be the ultimate limit, when he asks Jesus: "Lord, if my brother keeps offending me, how many times must I forgive him? Seven times?" In response, Jesus tells Peter: "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven."

"Seventy times seven" here does not mean four hundred and ninety, nor is it a mathematical power of seventy; rather, it carries a symbolic meaning implying forgiveness without end—forgiveness without limits. Indeed, human beings often impose limits on one another in social relationships, including in the realm of charity. People set limits on the number of times they forgive, lay down conditions for forgiveness, weigh the severity of offenses, and categorize those worthy of forgiveness. God, however, knows only limitless forgiveness; however many times a sinner turns to Him, that is how many times He grants forgiveness.

God's love is infinite, just as His nature is infinite. His forgiveness takes no account of numbers or categories. Proof of this lies in the fact that we may repeatedly confess the same sin—committing it again even after promising Him we would not, and sometimes committing it even more gravely—yet God simply looks at the moment we come to Him and forgives us.

Today, when Jesus tells Peter, "I do not say to you up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven," He is also inviting all of us to be ready to forgive one another, just as God has forgiven us.

2. Forgiveness is the condition for receiving forgiveness.

Immediately following the call to limitless forgiveness, Jesus teaches the condition for receiving God's forgiveness through the parable of the "unmerciful debtor." This parable reflects human nature: we desire to be forgiven, yet we find it difficult to forgive one another in turn.

The forgiveness we practice in our relationships with others serves as the standard by which God judges our worthiness to receive the reward of the Kingdom of Heaven; for it is written: "Do not judge, so that you may not be judged; do not condemn, so that you may not be condemned by God..." The offenses we commit against one another are insignificant compared to the offenses we commit against God, yet God has forgiven us a thousand times over. ...we, in turn, must forgive one another.

When we fail to forgive and harbor hatred, we are the first to suffer; we lose our appetite and sleep, consumed by anger and resentment, tossing and turning as we plot revenge. Yet, when we forgive, we are free from such burdens and find peace of soul. Forgiveness turns enemies into friends. Indeed, forgiveness can be the sweetest form of unexpected retribution; it can cause the other person to agonize over the realization that they were wrong to offend a good person, ultimately leading them to feel gratitude and change their attitude.

Forgiveness is truly difficult, yet it is the finest way to resolve interpersonal conflicts. If we constantly seek revenge, hatred only accumulates—passing from one generation to the next and fueling endless feuds between families. If I exact revenge on you, your child may seek revenge on me, and the cycle continues indefinitely. Conversely, when we respond to injury with kindness, not only is the enmity resolved, but we can also become friends and set an example for future generations.

Lord Jesus, grant us the humility to recognize our own weaknesses and limitations, so that we may readily empathize with others rather than condemn them. May we also be ever ready to forgive those who have offended us, that we, too, may receive Your forgiveness for our sins. Amen.