

In today's Gospel reading,
Jesus is teaching us
about forgiveness.

We are to forgive one another,
not just once or twice
but as a lifestyle.

It seems
forgiveness
is the heart of the gospel
and the distinctive character
of our Christian life.

Think about
the story
of God's relationship
to his people.

Over and over again,
in spite of our weakness,
or perhaps because of it,
God forgives us.

He forgives our poor choices,
he forgives our greed,
our carelessness,
our infidelities

and along the way
he heals us
and gives us strength.

In much the way
a parent hopes
a child
is soaking in
the lessons taught
by daily living,
God's discipline and
mercy toward
our transgressions
is a model that we
should be following.

In fact

we should be
handing out forgiveness
from our own joy
about the just
and loving way
our own sins
have been wiped clean.
But we don't want to.

It's true,
like Peter,
we sometimes
just don't want to.

How many times
must I forgive?
asks Peter.
In essence asking,
"How many times
must I treat others,
Lord,
the way you treat me?"
"Is once enough,
or how about seven?"

Secretly we might agree.
It's a valid question.

How many times
should we forgive?
Surely there should be
a limit,
a number at which
we stop lest we be
taken advantage of,
our good natures
betrayed.

But Jesus says
not to keep count,
and then he tells
a parable of a man
to whom mercy
and forgiveness was given
but who selfishly
and recklessly

denied that
same mercy
to one who owed him.

This parable
bids us to look
into the shadows
of our heart
to see what
miserly reactions
lurk there
and sweep them out .

We are invited
to send our l
esser impulses packing
and instead train
our hearts against
counting the transgressions.

We can indulge
in the discipline
of responding with joy
and gratitude
and mercy
to all those people
and creatures
God loves in this world.

In short,
we are to take
the grace and goodness
God pours out on us,
and on those we love,
and pay it forward.

There is a story
about a principal
who had a meeting
with some angry parents.
These parents were complainers.
This time they were
There to complain
About a teacher.

“This is the third problem!”

They scolded.
“Three strikes
and you’re out!”

The principal
gathered his thoughts
together and then responded,
“You know,
one of those strikes
was two years ago
and the other
is from last year.
Don’t we ever get
a new inning around here?”

Baseball has become
A great a source
of metaphor for counting sins.

Why in Katarina’s
first grade class room,
each child had a
behavior strike card
that was used to
monitor 6 year old’s
transgressions.

I’m happy to say
that Katarina
was home safe
on the behavior score,
but you better believe
she knew
that three strikes
meant some serious consequences.

We all know
we get three strikes
and we’re out!

If you think about it,
this metaphor is not
typically drawn out
to its logical conclusions.

After all,
there are three outs
per inning.
The batter
who is out
the first time up
will probably have
another two or three
at bats to come.

And the teams
come back to play
the next game,
and the next,
through out the season.

I find this analogy
a much better one
for how we are to be
in relation with each other.

We may do wrong,
we may fail to do right,
but we ask for
and receive forgiveness
and stay in relationship together,
whether we are on
the same team, or not,
and we continue to
play the game together.

Now Peter,
in today's gospel
was being generous.

He suggested
seven strikes
and you're out.

But our gospel
begs the question,
at what point do
we stop counting
transgressions
and begin a new inning?

One of the most generous
Things we can do
is to wipe
the slate clean
and grant those
who have transgressed
against us
a new inning.

It doesn't mean
there won't be
more forgiveness
needed in the future,
but it does mean
a new opportunity
to live out
Christ's love
as a forgiving person,
a disciple of the one
who forgives all our sins.

Back in grade school
We might have called this
Giving each other
a "do over"
Allowing each other
the chance
To be forgiven,
try again,
And get it right.

Now I want to be clear,
I don't think
that the gospel
tells us to take
whatever is dished out.

We have the right
and obligation
To speak up
when we are wronged,
And to seek justice.

But forgiveness
should always be

A part of the plan.

Just last week
Jesus talked
with the disciples
about what to do
about disagreements.

His plan called
for trying to
work things out
individually first,
then in a group
of two or three,
and then as a church.

After that, he says;
let that person
be to you
as a gentile
or tax collector
to you.

But before you think
that will let us
off the hook entirely,
remember how Jesus
treated gentiles
and tax collectors;
he ate with them,
healed them
and died for their sins.

But Jesus tells us
Forgiveness
has no limits,
just as my fathers
love for us
has no limits.

Both love and forgiveness
must simply become
a part
of how we operate,
the principle rule

of our lives.

For, If we are
counting the cost,
if we are
tallying the score
of how many times
we have shared
God's grace
with another,
then we are
unclean pitchers
used to pour clean water
out to a thirsty world.

When we do not forgive,
we are operating
as a part of an old order
that keeps count
and nurses anger.

Jesus calls us
to live
in a new order.
An order
that celebrates
the forgiveness
bought by the
cross of Christ ...
a forgiveness
so liberating
we must share it
with the world. Amen.