

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, September 17, 2017

The Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

This email, entitled Looking to Sunday®, focuses on one or more of the scripture readings for the coming Sunday. It prepares readers to hear God's Word at Mass and it offers a point of reflection to consider in the days leading to Sunday. Looking to Sunday is written by Father Tom

HOW MANY TIMES?

Imagine for a moment that as you left the reconciliation room after confessing your sins and receiving absolution, the Lord met you and asked, "How many more times would you like me to forgive your sins?"

Would your answer be a hundred times, five hundred times, a thousand times, five thousand times, ten thousand times?

If we thought about it, we might pick an even higher number. If we sin at least once a day, and we certainly all do – especially if we drive in the New York area – then we need God's forgiveness 365 times year. If we expect to live at least 40 more years that means we need God's forgiveness at least 14,600 more times. The more days we live, the more times we need God's forgiveness.

This Sunday's Gospel (Matthew 18:21-25), focuses our attention on the amount of forgiveness that God offers us and the amount of forgiveness God expects us to offer those who sin against us.

In the Gospel, Peter asks Jesus, "Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive? As many as seven times?" In suggesting seven times, Peter thought he was being more than merciful. He more than doubled the level of mercy suggested by many of the rabbis of his day. He was willing to forgive not three times as the rabbis advised, but seven times!

Yet, Jesus thought that number was far too small, far too miserly. Jesus tells Peter, "Not seven times but seventy-seven times."

In other words, Jesus symbolically tells Peter his forgiveness is not to be measured out and capped at a certain level. He is to forgive as often as his brother requires forgiveness.

Jesus then relates a parable illustrating the amount of forgiveness he expects his followers to show those who sin against them. In the parable, a king freely forgives a servant a huge debt when that servant pleads for mercy. Later, the servant whose debt was forgiven refuses to show any leniency to a fellow servant who owes him a very small amount.

In today's terms, the parable literally says the king forgave his servant a debt amounting to hundreds of millions of dollars, while that servant refused to forgive a debt amounting to a few thousand.

Like that king, God puts no limits on the forgiveness he shows us "debtors." And God expects us to show that same level of forgiveness to others.

None of us would want to put a limit on the number of times we would like God to show us mercy, to show us forgiveness. Likewise, God does not want us to limit the number of times we would be willing to forgive each other.

Forgive without limits. Forgive like the Lord!

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