

## DEACON GEORGE'S HOMILY FOR 24<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

In Jewish tradition, the Jews were taught that God forgives three times and then on the fourth time, he punishes them. Therefore, they could not believe that an injured or offended person could be more **gracious** than God, and therefore forgiveness is limited to three times.

Now Peter asks Jesus, "**Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive them?**" Then he answers his own question, by suggesting "**As many as seven times?**". Therefore, according to tradition, Peter's measure is generous. But to Jesus, it is radically insufficient, "**I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.**"

Matthew's Gospel today, is a continuation about dealing with relations between Christians. Today's parable of the unforgiving servant is told in order to **underline** the need for forgiveness. On reading or hearing this story of the merciless servant, each one of us would rightly judge him as a mean, low-life sort of man. A heartless man, who learns nothing from his personal experience of forgiveness, and puts himself outside the realm of mercy. He throttles his fellow servant for a paltry debt of 100 denarii, and will not listen to the poor man's plea for mercy. So, when we hear what the king did to the heartless servant, we heartily approve and probably say, "It served him right, he got what he deserved".

However, today, we had better stop, and think for a moment, and reflect that we ourselves may be that that merciless servant. Every time we have sinned, we have incurred an unpayable debt to God.

Each time we have received absolution, we have come out of God's courtroom as a free man or woman. Because a weight greater than a million pound debt, has been lifted from our shoulders. And all this because of God's loving, infinite mercy. How then can it happen that we could be so heartless, mean and foolish, as to refuse to forgive a neighbour for some offence, he or she, has committed against us.

Yet it happens, and there may be some among us here today who continue to have enmity in their hearts against those who have offended them. In their hard-heartedness they cannot get themselves to forgive and forget. Are these not following in the footsteps of the merciless servant? Will they not receive the punishment of the merciless servant, a punishment richly deserved? This will be the fate of all unforgiving Christians. For they will meet an unforgiving God, when they are called to settle their accounts.

But that day has not yet come for us. We still have time to put our affairs in order. We can still forgive all our enemies from our heart. If we do not, then we are cutting ourselves off from the possibility of having our own sins and offences forgiven by God. We have the solemn word of our divine Lord Jesus, for the lessons he draws from the parable: "**So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.**"

We could say that the unforgiving servant is **condemned** for loss of memory:- **Forgetting** our own sins leads to lack of compassion.

Through **forgetfulness** of God's compassion, we can end up being cruel to each other. **Remembering** how our sins have been forgiven and gone unpunished by God, should lead us to forgive others.

That is why at the beginning of Mass we are invited to be mindful of our own sins. "**Brothers and sisters let us acknowledge our sins and so prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries.**"

Only when we do that, can we pray "**Our Father ... forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us ...**"

The purpose of calling our sins to mind is not to paralyse us, but to remind us that we all live in the gracious forgiveness of God. Whoever we are, we remember our sins ... because we need to remember always to forgive.