

HOMILY for 24th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year A

This Sunday's Gospel tells us a very important spiritual lesson about reconciliation & forgiveness. Reflecting on that, I'm reminded of this new cute story that I'd like to share with you.

The Ecuadorian captain had grown increasingly anxious over rumors of an impending air strike from neighboring Peru. "Pedro," he ordered his aide-de-camp, "I want you to climb that mountain & report any signs of Peruvian military activity."

"Si, Capitano," replied Pedro. He trudged up the mountain, & as soon as he crossed the ridge he saw a squadron of planes heading their way. "There are many planes coming, Capitano," he promptly radioed back.

"Friends or enemies?" the Captain demanded urgently.

Pedro again lifted his binoculars to the sky. "They're flying very closely together, Capitano," he replied. "I think they must be friends."

Anyway, if there is one thing that might have stood in the way of peace & progress for a country or group, it would be dispute or conflict with another country or group. That is why we have seen some countries & groups have kept on destroying & fighting with others over the years without any hope of ending it soon. Worst yet, there are a lot of collateral damages as the result of these endless, dragged-out conflicts. We have seen famines, diseases, injuries, deaths, & destruction that would bring tears to our eyes. Or, if there is one thing that might have stood in the way of a familial relationship or a loyal friendship, it would be a disagreement or a fight. That is why we have witnessed many families & friends have been divided & broken. These divisions & broken relationships have caused a lot of heartache & permanent damages to countless homes & friendships. Or, if there is one thing that might have stood in the way of a faithful & loving relationship between a human being & God, it would be a fallout or rejection of it. That is why we have observed over the years God has tried to reconcile & call humanity back to the sacred covenant between God & the people of God. Unfortunately, the people of God have refused to reconcile & continued to follow their own paths of darkness.

Realizing the importance of reconciliation & forgiveness in all relationships, Peter came to Jesus in today's Gospel & asked, "Lord, when my brother/sister wrongs me, how often must I forgive him/her? Seven times?" "No," Jesus replied, "not seven times; I say, seventy times seven times." Then, He told him the parable of a king who wrote off the debt of an official & let him go. When the official met a fellow servant who owe a mere fraction of what he himself owed to the king, he seized him & put him in jail in spite of his pleading for mercy. His master learned about this & summoned the unmerciful & unforgiving official to reprimand, "You worthless wretch! I cancelled your entire debt when you pleaded with me. Should you not have dealt mercifully with your fellow servant, as I dealt with you?" Then in anger, the master handed him over to the torturers until he paid back all that he owed. Finally, Jesus concluded, "...My Heavenly Father will treat you in exactly the same way unless each of you forgives one's brother or sister from one's heart."

Without a doubt, Jesus has wanted us to forgive & reconcile with one another. Otherwise, He would not forgive us on Judgment Day. Unfortunately, most people have not heeded that serious warning of the Lord & have continued to threaten & oppress their lowly debtors. They have not realized that the Lord has forgiven them much bigger debts & would

ultimately have the last saying as the Parable reminded everyone. If the rich & the powerful have mistakenly assumed that they could trample on the poor & the lowly & treat other human beings like trash, they better think again. For the day will come when the Lord will hold them accountable for all their debts to Him & treat them exactly the same way. So, we better begin to forgive & reconcile with one another as the Lord has done so for us. But, what has really stood in the way of that reconciling process? Which hurdle has prevented the human family to forgive & reconcile with one another throughout human history?

Today's First Reading gives us the answers for those questions as following, "Wrath & anger are hateful things; yet the sinner hugs them tight. The vengeful will suffer the Lord's vengeance, for He remembers their sins in detail. Forgive your neighbor's injustice; then when you pray, your own sins will be forgiven." It continues, "...Should a man nourish anger against his fellows & expect healing from the Lord? Should a man refuse mercy to his fellows, yet seek pardon from his own sins? ...Remember your last days, set enmity aside." It seems like one of the biggest hurdles that might have prevented the two fighting parties from reconciling & forgiving one another is wrath & anger. The involved parties would often get angry at each other over all sorts of issues & stop talking to each other let alone reconciling & forgiving the other's wrongdoing. It is very unlikely that two angry parties would make peace & forgive one another. That is why we have seen fights in various relationships & conflicts in different regions of the world continue to happen. Unfortunately, many people prefer to hold on to wrath & anger & let it eat them up inside. That is why we have witnessed all sorts of random acts of violence happen around us every day & have heard about lots of physical & mental health problems like drinking, substance abuse, heart attack, ulcer, & so on as the result of wrath & anger. Worst yet, some have even embraced the vicious circle of vengeance to appease their thirst for more wrath & anger & keep that destructive fire burning. But, every wise person should remember the Last Day & put away all the anger & enmity if they want the Lord to forgive their sins on that day.

My dear brothers & sisters, reconciliation & forgiveness is not part of our human nature. For we are born to fight & step on one another's toes. But, our Lord Jesus & Christian faith would like us to change our human nature & learn to forgive & reconcile with one another as He showed us on the Cross. That way we could help replace our current world of endless fights & violence with the one of reconciliation & forgiveness. More importantly, we would like to emulate our Lord Jesus & forgive people who have wronged us seventy times seven times. If we could do that, our Heavenly Father will do the same & forgive our sins on the Last Day.