

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A

Sirach 27:30—28:7 | Romans 14:7–9 | Matthew 18:21–35

Two young brothers, Harry and James, had a heated argument just before bedtime. Harry had struck James with a stick, and soon there were tears and accusations. As their mother tucked them into bed, she tried to teach them a lesson about forgiveness. She said, “Boys, what would happen if one of you died tonight and you never had the chance to forgive each other?”

James thought for a moment, looked at his brother, and said, “Okay, I’ll forgive him tonight. But if we’re both alive in the morning, he’d better watch out!” We can laugh at James, but if we are honest, there is something very human in his response. We often want to put a limit on forgiveness.

The first reading gives us a strong warning:

“Resentment and anger are foul things, and both are found in the sinner.”

When we see something rotten, we want to get rid of it. But resentment is different. Sometimes we hold on to it for years. We remember the hurt, the words, the injustice, and what someone did to us.

Sirach says, “Mere creatures of flesh, man cherishes resentment.”

But resentment does not hurt only the other person. It hurts us. Unforgiveness is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die. It steals our peace and slowly poisons our hearts.

In today’s Gospel, Peter asks Jesus, “Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive? As many as seven times?”

Peter probably thought he was being very generous.

But Jesus answers, “Not seven times, but seventy-seven times.”

In other words: Stop counting. Stop keeping score.

Then Jesus tells the story of the servant who owed his master an enormous debt—something he could never repay. The master had compassion on him and forgave the entire debt.

But that same servant went out and refused to forgive another servant who owed him a much smaller amount.

He had received mercy, but he could not give mercy.

And sometimes we can be like that servant. We come before God and say, “Lord, forgive me.” We ask God to have mercy on us, and God does.

But then we can walk away still holding anger against someone who hurt us.

Jesus reminds us that the mercy we receive from God must also become mercy we give to others.

Forgiveness does not mean that what happened was okay. It does not mean that the hurt was not real. It does not mean that we must remain in an abusive or unsafe situation.

Forgiveness means that we refuse to let the hurt control our hearts.

Sometimes forgiveness takes time. Sometimes we have to pray:

“Lord, I am still hurting. I am not ready to forgive completely. But give me the grace to begin.”

And when we cannot forgive with our own strength, we can look at the Cross. Jesus, even while suffering, prayed:

“Father, forgive them.”

There is a beautiful story about two friends walking along a beach.

During their journey, they had an argument, and one friend slapped the other in the face.

The friend who was hurt said nothing. He simply knelt down and wrote in the sand:

“Today my best friend slapped me in the face.”

They continued walking and later went into the sea.

Suddenly, the friend who had been slapped began to drown. Without hesitation, his friend jumped into the water and saved his life.

After he recovered, he took a stone and carved into it:

“Today my best friend saved my life.”

His friend was surprised. He asked, “When I hurt you, you wrote it in the sand. But when I saved your life, you wrote it on a stone. Why?”

The friend replied:

“When someone hurts us, we should write it in the sand, where the wind of forgiveness can erase it. But when someone does something good for us, we should write it in stone, where nothing can erase it.”

What a beautiful lesson.

Sometimes we do exactly the opposite. We write people's faults in stone, but their goodness in sand.

We remember one hurtful word, but forget years of kindness. We remember one mistake, but forget all the good someone has done for us.

Jesus asks us today to change that.

Write the hurts in sand. Write the blessings in stone.

And think about what God has done for us. We have all needed God's forgiveness. We have all made mistakes. We have all failed to love as we should.

Yet God does not want us to remain prisoners of our past. He offers us mercy and a new beginning.

Every time we pray the Our Father, we say:

"Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us."

Those are serious words.

So today, Jesus asks each of us a quiet question:

Who is the person I am still having trouble forgiving? What hurt am I still carrying?

Perhaps we cannot solve everything today. But we can begin.

We can place that person in God's hands.

We can say, "Lord, bless this person. Heal my heart. Give me the grace to forgive."

The mercy we receive from God cannot end with us.

So today, let us stop counting the wrongs.

Let us write our hurts in the sand.

Let us carve God's goodness in stone.

And let us carry in our hearts the mercy and love of Jesus.

Amen.