

'And so the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who decided to settle his accounts with his servants. When the reckoning began, they brought him a man who owed ten thousand talents; but he had no means of paying, so his master gave orders that he should be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, to meet the debt. At this, the servant threw himself down at his master's feet. "Give me time," he said, "and I will pay the whole sum." And the servant's master felt so sorry for him that he let him go and cancelled the debt. Now as this servant went out, he happened to meet a fellow servant who owed him one hundred denarii; and he seized him by the throat and began to throttle him. "Pay what you owe me," he said. His fellow servant fell at his feet and implored him, saying, "Give me time and I will pay you." But the other would not agree; on the contrary, he had him thrown into prison till he should pay the debt. His fellow servants were deeply distressed when they saw what had happened, and they went to their master and reported the whole affair to him. Then the master sent for him. "You wicked servant," he said, "I cancelled all that debt of yours when you appealed to me. Were you not bound, then, to have pity on your fellow servant just as I had pity on you?" And in his anger the master handed him over to the torturers till he should pay all his debt. And that is how my heavenly Father will deal with you unless you each forgive your brother from your heart.'

■ **The Gospel of the Lord.**

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# Breaking Open the Word



# THE SAVING WORD

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME / A

17 SEPTEMBER 2023

## THE CALL TO FORGIVENESS

A well-balanced life is something worth striving for, but human nature being what it is, balance is not always easily achieved. Today the readings deal with the question of balance and consistency regarding how we expect God to treat us and the ways we deal with each other. Resentment, vengeance, and anger can all find their place in the human heart and Ecclesiasticus advises that a more tolerant approach is more beneficial. If we cannot forgive each other, how can anyone expect God to forgive our failings?

Matthew approaches the question from the other direction. Rather than looking at what we will receive from the Lord, the striking parable of the two debtors teaches us to look at what we have already received. Since God has already looked kindly and mercifully on us this should lead to a corresponding degree of forbearance with one another.

While it is not stated in today's reading from Romans, Paul is dealing with a community where there was some tension regarding eating meat left over from temple sacrifices. For the more liberal members of the community eating this meat was not a problem. Others in the community were scandalised and thought it was idolatry. Paul's approach is to remind both groups that whatever we do influences our brothers and sisters. As Christians, the way to find a sense of balance is to remember that we are called to live for the Lord. Sometimes this calls us to die to ourselves to preserve peace and unity. Christ gave his life for us all, should we not do the same for each other?

**Christopher Monaghan CP**

## FIRST READING

Sir 27:30–28:7

**A reading from the Book of Sirach.**

*Forgive your neighbour's faults and when you pray, your sins will be forgiven.*

Resentment and anger, these are foul things, and both are found with the sinner. He who exacts vengeance will experience the vengeance of the Lord, who keeps strict account of sin. Forgive your neighbour the hurt he does you, and when you pray, your sins will be forgiven. If a man nurses anger against another, can he then demand compassion from the Lord? Showing no pity for a man like himself, can he then plead for his own sins? Remember the last things, and stop hating, remember dissolution and death, and live by the commandments.

Remember the commandments, and do not bear your neighbour ill-will; remember the covenant of the Most High, and overlook the offence.

■ **The word of the Lord.**

**RESPONSORIAL PSALM** Ps 102: 1-4, 9-12. R. v. 8

**R. The Lord is kind and merciful; slow to anger and rich in compassion.**

1. My soul, give thanks to the Lord, / all my being, bless his holy name. / My soul, give thanks to the Lord / and never forget all his blessings. **R.**
2. It is he who forgives all your guilt, / who heals every one of your ills, / who redeems your life from the grave, / who crowns you with love and compassion. **R.**
3. His wrath will come to an end; / he will not be angry for ever. / He does not treat us according to our sins / nor repay us according to our faults. **R.**
4. For as the heavens are high above the earth / so strong is his love for those who fear him. / As far as the east is from the west / so far does he remove our sins. **R.**



## SECOND READING

Rom 14: 7-9

**A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Romans.**

*Whether alive or dead, we belong to the Lord.*

The life and death of each of us has its influence on others; if we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord, so that alive or dead we belong to the Lord. This explains why Christ both died and came to life, it was so that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

■ **The word of the Lord.**

## GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Jn 13: 34

**Alleluia, alleluia! / I give you a new commandment: / love one another as I have loved you. / Alleluia!**

## GOSPEL

Mt 18: 21-35

**A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.**

*I tell you that you forgive not seven times but seventy times seven.*

Peter went up to Jesus and said, 'Lord, how often must I forgive my brother if he wrongs me? As often as seven times?' Jesus answered, 'Not seven, I tell you, but seventy-seven times.'