



瀬田の丘

First published in 1973
Edited and published by the Public Relations
Department of the Catholic Seta Parish
Council 4-16-1 Seta, Setagaya-ku, Tokyo



Today's Word

The Twentyfourth Sunday, Year A (13 September)

Parish Priest: Father Hiroshi Konishi

First Reading: Sirach 27:30 - 28:7

Second Reading: Romans 14:7 - 9

Gospel Reading: Matthew 18:21 - 35

Reflections on the Three Readings

In the First Reading, "wrath and anger" serve as the motives for the sin of vengeance. However, if one shows "mercy to a fellow human being" (v. 4), it becomes possible to seek forgiveness for one's own sins. If human beings—who are all weak—persist in holding onto "wrath and anger," no one can forgive their sins (see v. 5). Therefore, we are strongly urged: "Do not harbor anger against your neighbor" (v. 7).

The word "live" appears repeatedly in the Second Reading. For Christians, who are called to live for God, the way of life of the Lord Jesus Christ—who himself lived for God the Father—serves as the model. The expression "we belong to the Lord" (v. 8) teaches us that our lives belong to Christ.

The Gospel Reading presents a parable about unlimited forgiveness. One who has received forgiveness ought to extend forgiveness to their neighbor. Yet, the servant in this parable lacks such magnanimity. The phrases "moved with compassion" (v. 27) and "have mercy" (v. 33) are striking. It is through these words expressing deep compassion that forgiveness is realized and relationships are restored. Forgiveness is, in essence, the restoration of relationships.

Last week's Gospel Reading focused on becoming a "brother" and gaining a "brother." Today's Gospel Reading focuses on "forgiveness" when that brother commits a sin.

Let us look at the exchange between Peter and Jesus. In verse 21, Peter asks, "How many times should I forgive?" It is said that Jewish rabbis taught that one should forgive a brother up to three times. When Peter asks Jesus, "Up to seven times?" he

appears to be quite kind and magnanimous. However, his focus is on the **number** of times one forgives. In other words, Peter likely viewed forgiveness as a form of endurance—a mindset where one might tolerate a wrong done to them up to three times, or perhaps seven. Yet, since human patience has its limits, such an act would not constitute true forgiveness.

Jesus responds with “seventy-seven times” (verse 22).

Genesis 4:24 states: “If vengeance for Cain is sevenfold, then for Lamech it is seventy-sevenfold” (Franciscan translation). There was no limit to vengeance. Drawing upon these ancient scriptural words, Jesus asserts that, conversely, there must be no limit to forgiveness. It is worth noting that when this passage from Genesis was later translated into Greek (the Septuagint), the phrasing became “seventy times seven.”

Consider the parable Jesus tells. Verse 24 mentions “ten thousand talents.” One talent is roughly equivalent to six thousand denarii; a single denarius can be thought of as a day’s wage. Thus, ten thousand talents amounts to sixty million days’ worth of wages—a debt beyond imagination. As described in verse 25, if a debt could not be repaid, it was common practice to sell off not only the debtor’s person and possessions but even their wife and children. The man’s reaction is striking. Verse 26 says he “prostrated himself... and earnestly pleaded” (the Franciscan translation uses “begged”). The word for “prostrate” is **proskyneō**; it describes the act of kneeling before a person or object and kissing their feet, the hem of their garment, or the ground itself. This same word is used when the Wise Men from the East come to the infant Jesus (see 2:2). The master, “moved with compassion” (v. 27), cancels the debt. This is the same word used when “Jesus went ashore and saw a great crowd; and He felt compassion for them and healed their sick” (14:14). It signifies a deep, heartfelt sympathy.

At the conclusion of the parable, verse 30 states, “But he refused.” The king did not cancel his servant’s debt simply because he was exercising patience; rather, “the master... felt compassion and forgave him” (v. 27). It is the king’s deep compassion that brings about forgiveness. This reveals that the king values his relationship with the servant more than recovering his money—and a vast sum of money at that! Here, we glimpse the true essence of forgiveness: it is the restoration of a human relationship that was on the verge of being severed. The true loss is not financial or material damage, but the impairment of fellowship between

brothers. Yet, the servant, having been forgiven, does the exact opposite to his fellow servant.

This makes the question in verse 33—"Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow servant?"—particularly striking. What the servant sought to cherish was not fellowship or relationship with the king or his fellow servant, but the money he had lent out. If we live as fellow members of God's family, those who have encountered the God who shows deep compassion and grants forgiveness ought to be people who forgive one another from the heart.