



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In today's Gospel, Jesus speaks to us of the need to forgive. Peter asks if he needs to forgive his brother as many as seven times. Jesus' response is, in essence, "seventy, seventies of seventy times"... in other words, there is no limit to how many times you are to forgive.

For all of those times that someone has lied to me or taken something without asking, for all of the times that I am annoyed by another, it may seem "small potatoes" to forgive. But Jesus doesn't just say we are to forgive the small sins against us, but *all* of the sins against us. Some people have been seriously hurt. Some people have experienced such deep betrayal, that it effects their whole lives.

And Jesus tells us that we must forgive them, as well. Why?! How can this be?! How can this be done?!

Jesus gives us this parable today. In essence, the first servant owes the master something comparable to \$100 billion (yes, billion, not million). Even should the servant win Powerball, he is so far from ever being able to pay it, it is laughable that he says that he will pay the master back in full. This is our debt to God. This is where sin leaves us with God. We are in a position where it is utterly impossible to redeem our debt to Him. Every sin, even the tiniest, is such an offense against the infinite love of God, that our debt is infinite. The Good News, of course, is that God has forgiven that debt by becoming one of us, taking that debt to the Cross, and destroying its power in the Resurrection. All we need to do is receive that gift, that forgiveness. The problem with this first servant is that he doesn't accept the forgiveness – he has in his mind that he will pay it back in full. When the second servant comes along, he owes the first servant the equivalent of \$5,000. Large, yes, but payable given enough time. But the first servant refuses to forgive the debt.

This, Jesus says, is our relationship with God and each other. God has forgiven all. The relatively small sins that we endure from others (small compared to how we have betrayed God, not necessarily "small" in terms of our own hurt or wounds), God has said we must forgive. Why? Because, in order to live in eternity, we must become *one* with the Heart of God... and God is a God who forgives.

So how do I forgive?

Forgiveness is both a choice and a process. We can do anything, even the impossible, with the help of God. We begin in prayer and, with Jesus and Mary taking us by the hand, make ourselves aware of the reality of the sin we have experienced at the hands of another and any hurt or wounds that sin has caused. From that place of hurt, we invite Jesus into our choice to forgive, "In the name of Jesus, I forgive _____ for ____." Be specific with the person and the hurt, as well as any negative effects that it has had on your life. Remember that forgiveness is a choice and, while it is closely akin to healing of the heart, they are not identical. The hurt may not go away immediately... or even for a while. At this point, you may have to forgive again tomorrow, and the next day... and seventy times seven days after that. Don't doubt that you have really forgiven, but remember that wounds can go deep and so forgiveness must go deep.

I can hear the objection, "But I don't even want to forgive." Then we take a step back and begin with praying for the person who hurt you. By spending time each day immersing that person in prayer, God will begin to change and heal our hearts to the point where we will be able to make the decision to forgive.

I hear another objection, "I can't even bring myself to pray for that person." Then we begin by praying for ourselves, asking God to change our hearts, to help us to *want to forgive* because we want to be like Him and His all forgiving love.

I want to bring up one other important point. Sometimes, the person in our lives who most needs forgiveness is ourselves. Sometimes, we can forgive anyone else, "But I knew better... and I sinned." It's okay, even *good* to forgive ourselves. After all, Jesus has forgiven us. How can we hold something against ourselves that even God doesn't hold against us. We can start forgiving ourselves in the same way – being aware of how I have hurt me, and then making a choice with Jesus to forgive myself. It may mean spending days and weeks ahead of time praying for ourselves so that we can get to the point of making the choice to forgive (with Jesus).

Jesus says that we *must* forgive each other from the heart. May He pour His grace upon us, and may we be open to that grace, so that we may truly forgive!