

Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Scripture Readings

First Reading: Sirach 27:30—28:9

Wrath and 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. Could anyone nourish anger against another and expect healing from the Lord? Could anyone refuse mercy to another like himself, can he seek pardon for his own sins? If one who is but flesh cherishes wrath, who will forgive his sins? Remember your last days, set enmity aside; remember death and decay, and cease from sin! Think of the commandments, hate not your neighbor; remember the Most High's covenant, and overlook faults.

Second Reading: Romans 14:7-9

Brothers and sisters: None of us lives for oneself, and no one dies for oneself. For if we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord; so then, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For this is why Christ died and came to life, that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

Gospel: Matthew 18:21-35

Peter approached Jesus and asked him, "Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus answered, "I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times. That is why the kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king who decided to settle accounts with his servants. When he began the accounting, a debtor was brought before him who owed him a huge amount. Since he had no way of paying it back, his master ordered him to be sold, along with his wife, his children, and all his property, in payment of the debt. At that, the servant fell down, did him homage, and said, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back in full.' Moved with compassion the master of that servant let him go and forgive and forgave him the loan. When that same servant had left, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a much smaller amount. He seized him and started to choke him, demanding, 'Pay back what you owe.' Falling to his knees, his fellow servant begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' But he refused. Instead, he had the fellow servant put in prison until he paid back the debt. Now when his fellow servants saw what had happened, they were deeply disturbed, and went to their master and reported the whole affair. His master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you your entire debt because you begged me to. Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant, as I had pity on you?' Then in anger his master handed him over to the torturers until he should pay back the whole debt. So will my heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives your brother from your heart."

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Psalm 103

The Lord is kind and merciful, slow to anger, and rich in compassion.

Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all my being, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.

He pardons all your iniquities, heals all your ills. He redeems your life from destruction, crowns you with kindness and compassion.

He will not always chide, nor does he keep his wrath forever. Not according to our sins does he deal with us, nor does he requite us according to our crimes.

For as the heavens are high above the earth, so surpassing is his kindness toward those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he put our transgressions from us.

The Lord is kind and merciful, slow to anger, and rich in compassion.

Opening Prayer: Look upon us, O God, Creator and ruler of all things, and, that we may feel the working of your mercy, grant that we may serve you with all our heart. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Breaking Open the Word

We believe that the Word of God is living and effective. That means when we read or listen to Scripture, it is Jesus who speaks to us now, in the present moment of our lives. His Living Word gives us hope, purpose and direction in our lives. As we break open these readings for this Sunday, reflect on these questions:

What is Jesus saying to me personally that will give purpose and encouragement to me now?

Am I open to the way Jesus' words are living and effective in the people and world around me?

How will I respond to his message contained in these living words today?

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What Does It All Mean?

*These words of reflection are taken from **The Word of the Lord: Reflections on the Sunday Readings, Cycle A** by Philip J. McBrien, Twenty-Third Publications, 1995*

First Reading: Sirach 27:30—28:7

Among Sirach's long collection of observations about life, we find today's verses on anger, sin, vengeance, and forgiveness. The sinner clings to anger, the vengeful will feel the Lord's vengeance. In a precursor to Jesus' own prayer, Sirach insists that when we forgive the neighbor's injustice our own sins will be forgiven. It is essential that the person of faith keep the reality of death in mind and stop sinning. He or she must remember the commandments, as well as the covenant to which each Christian is bound. Sirach implies that life is too short to be filled up with hate and anger.

Second Reading: Romans 14:7-9

Throughout this letter, Paul responds to disagreements among the Christians in Rome. He intends to settle their arguments by appealing to basic tenets of faith. Yet his responses speak to all Christians, in all times. In this text he makes the point that whatever choices we face, we are not our own masters. In life and in death we are the Lord's servants. Indeed, Christ died and came into new life in order that he might be lord of everyone who lives, as well as lord of everyone who has died.

Gospel: Matthew 18:21-35

When Peter asks Jesus how often he should forgive someone who wrongs him, Jesus insists that he must forgive "seventy times seven" times. Then he summarizes the proper behavior of the individual disciple, and of the church, with a parable of three scenes. In the first scene a king intends to settle accounts with his officials. One owes an enormous amount, and as he cannot pay, the king orders him to be sold, along with family and property, to repay the debt. But the man begs for patience, promising to pay back everything in full. In response, the king does more than he has been asked, canceling the debt. In scene two, the same official demands payment from one of his own debtors. When the man begs for mercy, he refuses to hear of it, and throws the man in jail. But the king hears of this incident, and in the final scene the king brings the official in before him to condemn his actions. To conclude, Jesus assures Peter that his heavenly Father will treat him in exactly this manner unless he forgives brother and sister from the heart. The implication is clear. The Father has already forgiven each of us many more debts than we can ever imagine. We must act toward others in a manner like that which has been granted to us. This story illustrates graphically the phrase in the Lord's prayer, "Forgive us, as we forgive." It also suggests the enormity of the gifts with which God has blessed us. We are

like the heavily-indebted servant, and we have asked God to reschedule our payments. Acting as only God can do, God has canceled the debt. The next move is ours.

Closing Reflection and Prayer are taken from Ascend: A Companion to the Sunday Readings, Cycle A, Life Teen Publications, 2019

Lord, Have Mercy

How badly do you want the Lord to forgive your sins? How far are you willing to go for God's mercy? Usually the answers to those questions are directly proportional to how seriously we take and view our own sins. If we view our sins as deadly and our salvation as a work in progress, we will seek the Lord, daily, and in the confessional, often. If, however, we view our sins as "not that big a deal" or "not as bad as other people's sins" we grow slothful in our faith life and prayer. We won't seek God's mercy and, in turn, won't readily offer mercy to those who have wronged us. Sirach is as practical and wise as ever in this first reading. We are given a glimpse into the fate that awaits those so filled with anger. The "tighter we hug" wrath and anger, the more we open ourselves up to God's just vengeance. The Lord is kind and merciful, though, as we hear in the psalm, so where would vengeance come into this? When we refuse to offer mercy to others, we close ourselves off to God's mercy toward us, as we see in the Gospel. We must "forgive from our hearts", we are reminded, because in doing so we are *with* the Lord. And those who "live for the Lord" and "die for the Lord," **are the Lord's**. Thank the Lord this week for his great mercy by offering mercy to those in your life who least deserve it but most need it.

Lord God, sometimes I am so complacent in my faith. I don't really work hard and I take for granted the peace I do have in my life. Please give me the clarity this week to see in what areas of my life I have found myself comfortable. Please help me grow in faith this week, although it may cause me a little bit of discomfort. Amen.