

My Brothers and Sisters,

Both today's reading Sirach and today's Gospel are about mercy and forgiveness. God's mercy and forgiveness are presented to us as the model for our mercy and forgiveness.

At the beginning of the Gospel, Peter asked Jesus how many times he had to forgive a brother who had sinned against him. When he threw out the number seven, I am sure Peter thought he was being generous in forgiving. Therefore, Peter must have been shocked when Jesus responded by saying not seven times, but seventy-seven times. Jesus was telling Peter that we must always forgive others because God always forgives us.

In the first part of the parable of the unforgiving debtor, Jesus also makes the point that forgiveness and mercy must be free. We cannot attach conditions to mercy and forgiveness. In the parable, the king, who represents God, completely erases the debt of the servant who owed him "*a huge amount*" when that servant asked for forgiveness and mercy.

The second part of the parable of the unforgiving debtor makes the point that our own forgiveness hinges on our willingness to forgive others. Almost immediately after the king forgave the servant who owed him "*a huge amount*, that same servant met another servant who only owed him a small amount and was totally unwilling even to allow him time to pay off his debt. When the king found out about his unwillingness to forgive and be merciful to his fellow servant, the master hauled him back in and reinstated his debt. This is a consistent theme of Jesus' teaching. In the Our Father, Jesus taught us to pray, "*Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.*" At the end of the Our Father, Jesus added for emphasis, "*If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions*" [Mt. 6:14-15].

Today's reading from Sirach gives us another insight into forgiveness and mercy: "*Wrath and anger are hateful things, yet the sinner hugs them tight.*" In the Old Testament, we are told that God not only forgives but also forgets. Obviously God cannot forget anything. The Old Testament is telling us that when God forgives, he lets go of our sins. Forgiveness is a process that takes time because true forgiveness means letting go of the offense or hurt. When we fail to let go of offenses and hurts, we are hurting ourselves far more than we hurt the person we fail to forgive. Also, just as it is important to forgive others, it is equally important that we be willing to forgive ourselves.

My brothers and sisters, in today's reading from Paul's Letter to the Romans, we heard, "*None of us lives for oneself, and no one dies for oneself.*" The 1966 British edition of the Jerusalem Bible translates this verse very differently: "*The life and death of each of us has its influence on others.*" Our life and our death influences for better or for worse the lives of everyone who has ever been part of our lives. Whether we recognize it or not, we make a difference in the lives of others. Not only do we influence those who are or have been part of our lives, through them we influence the lives of those who are part of their lives. Our life and our death have a ripple effect. If we think about our lives this way, we quickly realize that all the choices we make, make a real difference in the lives of others. If we think about our lives this way, we quickly realize how important it is that we make good choices.