

My Brothers and Sisters,

In today's first reading, Sirach writes, "*Remember your last days...remember death and decay, and cease from sin.*" When Catholics my age and older were growing up and attending Catholic schools, we thought more about death, judgment, and life after death than we do today. We were taught that the choices we were making today did not just have consequences today but could also affect our eternal destiny. It seems to me that today our focus is almost exclusively on our earthly lives. Most of us do not think about our eternal destiny. However, Paul suggests we should when he wrote to the Romans, "*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...*"

Today's first reading and Gospel contrast two very different ways of dealing with those who treat us badly, are unjust to us, or sin against us. According to Sirach, although wrath and anger are hateful, many people hold them tight. If media and social media are any indication, today many people are so angry about so many things that they become vengeful and destructive. Instead of letting go and forgiving, many people actually feed their anger against others and actually come to hate others. On the other hand, there are those who, remembering their eternal destiny, forgive others and are merciful to others, cease from sin, do not hate, and overlook faults.

In the practical realm, Sirach reminds us that we have to trust in God and let go of a lot. Although there are going to be times when we are angry, anger is a feeling that is neither good nor bad. What matters is how we deal with our anger. We can hold onto it and nourish it so that we become more angry until we explode and become hateful, or we can work through our anger, perhaps address our issues with the other person, and gradually let go of the hurt or the anger. Sirach was a great psychologist: "*Could anyone nourish anger against another and expect healing from the Lord?*" If we nurture our anger, we will never get over it. When we hold on to anger, it hurts us a lot more than it hurts the person with whom we are angry.

In today's Gospel, Peter asked Jesus if he had to forgive someone who sinned against him as many as seven times. When Jesus responded seventy-seven times, he was saying that we should never not forgive someone. At the same time we need to understand what Jesus was not saying. He was not saying we have to put ourselves in positions to be hurt over and over. Nor was he saying that there should be no consequences to people's bad behavior. What he was saying is that no matter what happens we still have to forgive from the heart.

In the parable of the unforgiving debtor, when the debtor who owed him a lot asked for mercy, the king was moved with compassion and forgave the entire debt. That same debtor refused to have mercy on someone who owed him a small debt. When their fellow servants saw what had happened, they reported him to the king, and the king then handed the unforgiving debtor over to the torturers until he paid back the whole amount. Jesus' message is clear: God will forgive anything and everything if we forgive others from our heart.

My brothers and sisters, as challenging as it is to forgive others, it is sometimes more difficult to forgive ourselves. We need to treat ourselves as a best friend. In my experience, most of the wrong that most of us do is not malicious. We need to be sorry, we need to make amends, we need to commit ourselves to change, but we also need to forgive ourselves because God forgives us.