

24TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Life is full of occasions when willingly or unwillingly, we hurt one another. From the hurt comes pain and bitterness. More often than not, we keep on brooding over the hurts that others have caused us, making us slow to forgive our offenders and we may even have the desire to retaliate; to take revenge on an offending neighbor. Sometimes we wonder if we have to forgive our offenders and if we have to forgive them how often must we do so.

In the gospel reading of today, Peter also wanted to know how often a fellow-disciple must be forgiven.

He asked, "Lord, if my brother sins against me how often must I forgive? As many as seven times?"

The answer that Jesus gave makes it evident that we must exercise considerable generosity with respect to forgiveness.

Jesus answered, "I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times".(Some versions read seventy times seven)

In our Christian lives we know how merciful God is and how He is always ready to receive us back when we have wandered away from him. In turn, He asks that in our lives we pass on this forgiveness to others. This, sometimes, we find very difficult.

What we should know is that forgiveness is a gift which must be given to the person who will extend it to another. We say in the Lord's Prayer: Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

This is why Jesus teaches in the parable of the Unforgiving Servant in today's gospel reading that the person who forgives will in turn know God's forgiveness.

We always ask for God's mercy and forgiveness as we seek to strengthen our relationship with Him. Let us ask for His special help which will enable us to be merciful and forgiving. We need his spirit of forgiveness to help us to forgive those who have caused us pain and sorrow without counting the number of times we have already forgiven them.

For us to be forgiving, we also need to remember that our human relations should be governed by self-sacrificing love. Without self-sacrificing love and God's grace, we may find it difficult to forgive injuries.

One way for us to be conscious of the need to forgive others is to reflect on God's unconditional love and forgiveness. By reminding ourselves that God forgives us many times without keeping a record, we can strive to imitate His forgiveness. He expects us to do the same with our brothers and sisters.

As we forgive others and they also forgive us, we experience more the mercy of God towards us as each of us becomes an instrument of God's mercy and forgiveness.

St Paul in the second reading tells us that we belong to Christ. Belonging to Christ means that our lives are lived in communion with him. Our attitudes, way of thinking, our relationships and behaviors are patterned on Christ's own. Let us allow this exhortation of St Paul motivate us as we struggle to extend forgiveness to our offenders and to set enmity aside.