

Reflection for the 24th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Cycle A

The lectionary translation of the readings for this Sunday can be found at <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/091723.cfm>

1st Reading: [Sirach 27:30–28:7](#)

The book we simply call Sirac is part of the wisdom tradition of the ancient Hebrew people. It wasn't ancient enough to be included in the Hebrew Canon but was known by the people of Jesus' time. The wisdom books are not written in a particular order. There is simply a section on a particular subject and then later a new subject is chosen about which to write. This book was written in Hebrew by the son of Sirac and later translated into Greek by his grandson. This book was used extensively by the early Church and was given the name Ecclesiasticus "for the Church". The selection we have today deals with forgiveness, just like the Gospel, and like the Gospel asks how we can expect forgiveness from the Lord if we do not forgive.

2nd Reading: [Romans 14:7–9](#)

The selection we have today is part of a section (Rom 14:1-15:13) which seems to be about some kind of conflict between people who are weak in their faith, and have adopted special practices, and people who are strong in their faith. The gist of the section is "don't judge each other." Paul's message is that we are all the same because we are all accepted by the Lord and the Lord is master of us all; it is the Master who will judge us all. Were Paul says, "none of us lives for oneself and none of us dies for oneself" it should be understood to mean "no one lives as his own master and no one dies as his own master." (UBSH)

Gospel: [Matthew 18:21–35](#)

I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times. Mt 18:22

I was coming up to the US from Mexico one day, a while back, and I needed to get over one lane to the right. There was a car there so I sped up to pass him and, oh by the way I have these really cool lights in my mirror that tell me when someone is in my blind spot, so... I waited till the lights stopped flashing and then pulled over in front of the other car.

I don't know exactly what happened... maybe he decided to speed up since I passed him, I don't know. Either way, I evidently pulled in front of him to closely. He then sped up and went around me. He pulled in front of me, almost taking my fender off, and then slowed down. I guess he was mad.

That is not forgiveness. I should have had this Gospel passage ready to read to him. I did learn my lesson though...

I know you've heard of the concept "forgive and forget"? That's not in this passage but where is that, in the Bible? It's not there! It's not biblical. It comes from Cervantes' 17th century novel *Don Quixote*. We have been laboring under that for 400 years now, and it's not doable. We can't forgive and forget. Only God does that. Human beings can't. We don't have that much control over our memories. But I'll get back to that later.

What is forgiveness? It is an act of the will. We decide to forgive and there is a process involved. The first step in the process is letting go of our desire to pay the person back for what they did. Or sometimes we don't want to pay them back, we want life or God to pay them back. Think about it; when we are angry with someone, we want to strike out at them, don't we?

Anger, by the way, is not really a sin. Anger is an emotion, and we don't choose to have emotions so they, in and of themselves, cannot be sins. Emotions, though, give us energy and how we choose to use that energy is what makes it sinful or not. If we choose to use that energy to get back at the other person, or if we choose to use it to feed our anger, then it is definitely sinful.

So, the first step in the process of forgiveness is to let go of our desire to pay the other person back or our desire to have something bad happen to them. The second step has to do with our memory.

Like I said, we can't control our memories. Memories just pop up in our minds. The problem is that if the memory is about something someone did to us, the anger comes right back with it. When that happens, some people think that they haven't really forgiven the person. That's not true. Forgiveness is an act of the will and remember there is a process involved. When we choose to forgive someone, that begins the process.

When a memory brings the anger back, the next part of the process is to let it go. Do the two deep breathes routine and let it go. Let it go again and again every time our memory brings it back. It's power over us lessens each time we do that. Eventually, we can have the memory and the anger doesn't come back with it at all. The incident then lives in the past, where it belongs and no longer has any power over us in the present.

That's the process of forgiveness and we have to see it through to the end because we don't want anything, especially anger, to have power over us. It gets in the way of our ability to fully enjoy the life God gave us. Oh, and by the way, Jesus told us we have to forgive.

Reflection:

Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him? As many as seven times? Mt 18:21

Question:

What words or phrases grabbed your attention during the Liturgy of the Word on Sunday? What connection do those words or phrases have to your day-to-day life? (Why do you think they grabbed your attention?) What might God be trying to say to you through these words or phrases? What response should you make? What action should you take?

Alternative:

Reflect upon/Share about a time when you had difficulty forgiving someone. What stood in the way of your ability, or desire, to forgive? After hearing this Gospel, how would you handle that situation differently?

Verse by Verse:

[Mt 18:21-22](#) “Lord, if my brother sins against me...” | Verses 21 & 22 connect the following parable with the teaching about fraternal correction that went before in Mt 18:15-20. They recall Mt 18:15 and the words “against you” are appropriate here.

[Mt 18:22](#) “...seventy-seven times.” | This can also be translated “seventy times seven times” It is not meant to be an exact number but means an infinite number of times. (UBSH) This seems to be a development of Lk 17:4 which states that the sinner requests forgiveness seven times. (JBC) The closest connection I can find to this command in the Hebrew Scriptures is Lv 19:18, the command to love our neighbor as ourself. It says “Take no revenge and cherish no grudge against your own people.”

[Mt 18:23](#) “...decided to settle accounts with his servants.” | This speaks of reviewing the records of transactions the servants were involved in. I’m confused, though, as to the situation of the servants. AYBC says they were subordinate officials because of the large sum involved. JBC says he was a high officer of state, a viceroy, who defaulted on his payment to the king. UBSH also says he was a higher official. The implication is that this official dealt with transactions for the kingdom and was required to pay the king his portion of the income, upon which he defaulted. My confusion is that Mt 18:27 uses the Greek word which technically means a loan. (UBSH) Was it money owed because of transactions made on behalf of the kingdom, or was it a loan?

[Mt 18:24](#) “debtor” | Debt here is used metaphorically for sin just as in the Our Father. The word we translate as sin in the Our Father is the same Greek word here used for debt. The idea is that when we sin, we owe a debt to God and the person we sinned against.

[Mt 18:24](#) “...a debtor was brought before him...” | This probably indicates that the man was in prison. (UBSH)

[Mt 18:24](#) “...who owed him a huge amount.” | The Greek actually says he owed 10,000 talents. This is a symbolic number. In the ancient world 10,000 was the largest number used in computation and a talent was the largest unit of currency. This is symbolic of a shockingly staggering amount. For comparison, King Herod’s annual income was 900 talents. (UBSH)

[Mt 18:25](#) “Ordered him to be sold, along with his wife, his children and all his property.” | Jewish law only allowed a robber to be sold and would not have allowed his wife to be sold. This is meant to be a shocking punishment. (UBSH) JBC indicates that it was a common practice in the non-Jewish Roman world.

[Mt 18:28](#) “...he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a much smaller amount.” | The Greek actually says he owed him 100 denarii. A denarii is about a day’s wage. (UBSH & JBC) The debt the first servant owed to the king was 500.000 times more. (UBSH) AYBC indicates that 2 denarii would provide an adequate wage and that a talent consists of 6,000 denarii.

[Mt 18:30](#) “...had him put in prison...” | This was meant to be shocking because, in ancient Palestine, it was not customary to be put in prison because of a debt. (UBSH)