



TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME - A

Today in St Matthew's gospel (Mt 18:21-35), Peter asks Jesus how many times must I forgive my brother if he wrongs me? Peter then goes on to answer his own question with the number seven. Seven was the perfect number, so it seemed to be the perfect answer, and in suggesting seven Peter was being generous by the standards of his culture which only required you to forgive your brother three times. But, Jesus goes on to say not seven times, but seventy-seven times. In other words, we must forgive our brothers and sisters at all times.

In 1981 there was an attempt on the life of Pope John Paul II. Fortunately, the Pope lived. After he recovered, he shocked the world when he made a visit to Rome's prison on Christmas Day, to speak with the man who attempted to assassinate him. Millions watched the Pope visit Mehmet Ali Agca in his prison cell. When the Pope emerged from the cell he said: "I spoke to a brother whom I have forgiven."

Jesus, after his initial discussion with Peter about forgiveness, goes on to tell the famous parable about the unforgiving servant, which reflects the lack of gratitude of a servant who is forgiven an enormous sum of money, probably in our days a few million dollars. It is an impossible sum to repay in a lifetime, and so he asks for time. The master showing compassion to the servant cancels the debt, showing great mercy and compassion.

This servant then meets a fellow servant, who makes the exact same request as the first servant did from the master. The second servant asked for time to pay a fairly small sum of money, but received an angry and violent reply.

We, represent the fellow servants who are outraged by the behaviour of the servant who exacts justice, when he was called to also show mercy.

The original, large debt of the first servant, who refused to show mercy to his fellow servant, is now re-instated, and he has all the time he now needs to pay the debt: the rest of his life. This situation is of his own doing.

Today, there is justified outrage against those who are in a position to show mercy to others but refuse to do so. So many want to keep people in debt, when they could so easily cancel the debt, and allow them to live without carrying the burden of debt for the rest of their lives.

Pope Francis says, that 'God's name is mercy.' He also says that we are about building bridges not walls. If we forgive our brother and sister from our heart, than we are reaching out to them, as Christ reached out to us, by healing us and forgiving us from the cross. Jesus is the bridge between the Father and us.

May we continue to build the bridges which forgive our brothers and sisters from our heart.

[Fr Kelvin](#)