

9. March 2021

**“The grace of forgiveness”**

*Mt 18:21-35*

*Then Peter went up to him and said, 'Lord, how often must I forgive my brother if he wrongs me? As often as seven times?' Jesus answered, 'Not seven, I tell you, but seventy-seven times. 'And so the kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king who decided to settle his accounts with his servants. When the reckoning began, they brought him a man who owed ten thousand talents; he had no means of paying, so his master gave orders that he should be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, to meet the debt. At this, the servant threw himself down at his master's feet, with the words, "Be patient with me and I will pay the whole sum." And the servant's master felt so sorry for him that he let him go and cancelled the debt. Now as this servant went out, he happened to meet a fellow-servant who owed him one hundred denarii; and he seized him by the throat and began to throttle him, saying, "Pay what you owe me." His fellow-servant fell at his feet and appealed to him, saying, "Be patient with me and I will pay you." But the other would not agree; on the contrary, he had him thrown into prison till he should pay the debt. His fellow-servants were deeply distressed when they saw what had happened, and they went to their master and reported the whole affair to him. Then the master sent for the man and said to him, "You wicked servant, I cancelled all that debt of yours when you appealed to me. Were you not bound, then, to have pity on your fellow-servant just as I had pity on you?" And in his anger the master handed him over to the torturers till he should pay all his debt. And that is how my heavenly Father will deal with you unless you each forgive your brother from your heart.'*

The Lord can hardly show us more clearly how important forgiveness is to Him! We understand the answer for Peter: he should always be ready to forgive. Never should the heart become so closed that forgiveness can no longer be given!

This is often not easy for a deeply wounded heart. It may have withdrawn into itself and be plagued by the hurt emotions and great hatred may arise against the offender! Then when the message comes that one is invited to grant forgiveness, the inner self resists!

But let us hear the word of the Lord and if the Lord says it, then it must also be possible - at least that one sets out on the path to forgiveness and does not close the heart!

Let us look at the example of the Lord! He himself suffered terrible injustice with an intensity that we can hardly imagine. He encountered the hatred of the devil, who incited people to torture him in every possible way, even to the point of crucifixion. But it was not only physical suffering that Jesus suffered. Even worse for him was the rejection of love and the insults that were inflicted on him as the Son of God. These are spiritual and also mental sufferings of unimaginable depth, because these sufferings are also connected with the fact that people can reject the love of the Saviour and be eternally lost. What pain!

And yet our Saviour was able to forgive. *“Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing.”* (Lk 23:34) Here we encounter the greatness of the Christian faith, which, in following its Master, asks this readiness to forgive from us.

Through the following parable, Jesus showed Peter that there is a duty of love to forgive and that a great wrong is done if we do not act mercifully and do not forgive the other person's guilt when he asks us to.

How can we grow into this readiness to always grant forgiveness?

First of all, in order to understand the parable that the Lord sets before us, it is important that we ourselves live from God's forgiveness. We are the ones who do not have to pay our debt because the Lord is merciful to us. That is the starting point of everything, as it is also echoed in the Lord's Prayer: *“Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.”*

So we live in God's readiness to reconcile, which is always there for us. It even has its own sacramental form in which God's act of kind forgiveness is granted to us by the priest - when we repent and ask God for pardon.

The ability to forgive again and again is a grace we can ask for. When our heart is closed or in danger of being closed, we call on the Holy Spirit and ask him to touch our heart. If we do not want to forgive, it can also be that our pride stands in our way and we want to make the other person wait, so to speak, because we think we are in the position of the stronger.

But what about forgiveness if the other person does not ask for it? It is clear that reconciliation cannot take place, just as God's forgiveness does not happen if we do not ask for it and accept it as His gift! But here too the Lord is our example: He is always ready to forgive, His heart is always open to the sinner, His offer of forgiveness is there.

If, in following the Lord with His grace, we also try to bring our heart into that state which leaves it open to the other person, then we make it easier for the other person to ask for forgiveness. We then stand at the door like the father in the parable of the prodigal son and look out for the one who owes us something (*cf. Lk 15:11-21*). Perhaps we can even go out to meet him.

But, in order to reach into the whole reconciliation, it needs the request for forgiveness of the debt!