

"Lord, if my brother sins against me, how *often* must I forgive? As many as *seven times*?" This is the opening question St. Peter asks our Lord Jesus in today's Gospel and I feel like you can't help but notice something a little off regarding the tone of Peter's question. I mean his question seems rooted in a self-centered legalism that treats mercy and forgiveness as some sort of loathsome burden.

And why does St. Peter use the number seven in asking Jesus if that's how many times he should forgive? Is Peter trying to put a "limit" on how forgiving we should be? Well in the ancient world, the number "7" represented totality and completeness and so by Jesus answering that we must forgive *not seven times, but seventy-seven times*, our Savior is basically saying that we should be willing to forgive others *without limit!* Jesus is using hyperbole here to demonstrate precisely that you *can't put a numerical limit on mercy!*

In other words, what's demanded of us as disciples of Christ regarding our relationships with others is *limitless forgiveness!* We're called to forgive others *just* as our merciful Father forgives us! We're called to be merciful with others in the *same way* our Heavenly Father is

merciful with us. God the Father is *infinite Mercy itself*, and Jesus, His beloved Son, is Mercy incarnate. Of out His boundless love and goodness, God is *always* ready and willing to forgive us poor sinners and so as disciples of His Son, we must be *equally ready and willing* to forgive those who sin against us.

Now if we're honest with ourselves, then we'll admit that given our weak, fallen nature, it's *extremely hard* to be merciful as the Father is merciful. But it's *never impossible*. With the help of God's grace, *all things are possible*. And so in order to be humble instruments of Divine mercy, we must depend *entirely* on God for the grace to be merciful as *He is merciful*. Brothers and sisters, in forgiving others as God lovingly forgives us, this is *exactly* how we become holy and share in God's own nature, which is infinite mercy.

And let's face it, as sinners, we love talking about the infinite mercy of God, which gives us all these "nice warm fuzzies" inside and makes us feel good. And we love talking about how God is always willing to forgive us, *which He truly is*. Yet, Jesus' parable of the Unforgiving Servant in today's Gospel powerfully highlights the selfish

and fallen tendency we can have to demand God's mercy *for ourselves as sinners*, but *to deny that same mercy to those who've sinned against us and others*. Through the parable in today's Gospel, Jesus is lovingly calling us out and strongly urging us to not be selfish with His divine mercy, but to be merciful to others *as He is merciful with us*.

And again, what is "mercy"? Mercy is *not weakness*. Mercy is *not* "code" for moral relativism, where "anything goes" and we're supposed to tolerate and accept sin and evil. Mercy doesn't pretend that sin and evil aren't real and don't matter, but rather mercy *presupposes* the reality and destructiveness of both. Mercy is *true strength* and therefore it may be defined as *the willingness to forgive the sin(s) of another*. In fact, mercy is *precisely* how we overcome and destroy the the sins committed against us. As disciples of Christ, we're called to be humble instruments of God's mercy in the world, *especially* in our "own little worlds" comprised of our family, friends, co-workers, and any strangers we might encounter.

A major obstacle to radiating God's mercy to everyone around us is one of fallen humanity's favorite pastimes that we sinners like to

enjoy occasionally—and that is “holding grudges.” What is a grudge?

A “grudge” may be defined as “a persistent feeling of ill will or resentment resulting from a past insult or injury, either real or perceived.” Brothers and sisters, grudges are so harmful and destructive, not only for ourselves, but also for those whom the grudge is against.

And just practically speaking, what do grudges actually accomplish? The only thing grudges practically do is build up anger, bitterness, and hatred within our hearts. Grudges are like heavy chains that enslave us in misery and resentment. If we’re truly honest with ourselves, grudges don’t make us feel better or superior to the ones who’ve hurt us—they actually make us feel worse and they slowly eat away at us, destroying us, and ultimately prevent us from being the loving and faithful disciples of Christ we’re called to be. And some grudges aren’t even rooted in reality because they’re based on false perceptions of others and their past behavior towards us. In the end, grudges prevent us from becoming the best version of ourselves—from becoming all who God has created us to be!

Brothers and sisters, life is too short and too fragile to hold grudges. Our Lord Jesus doesn't want us to be enslaved by bitterness, resentment, and revenge. Mercy and forgiveness lead to freedom, peace, happiness, and true love. Mercy and forgiveness are signs of strength, *not weakness*—so with God's grace, let us be strong, rise above evil, and forgive those who've hurt us.

I think today our Savior is challenging us to examine our lives and ask: Do I need to forgive someone in my life? And if so, why? Am I holding a grudge against someone in my life and why am I unable to let go of it? Am I struggling to forgive a spouse, family member, friend, or a co-worker? Why am I denying that person the same divine mercy that *I seek* as a sinner?

Brothers and sisters, soon after our merciful Savior becomes truly present on this altar through the Most Holy Eucharist, we'll pray the Our Father, the prayer that Jesus Himself has given to us. As we pray this common prayer that we're so used to, let's not just go through the motions, but let's truly *mean* what we say, when we pray those words: "Forgive us our trespasses *as we forgive those who trespass against us.*"