

## 24TH SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME YEAR A

Sirach 27:30-28:7

Romans 14:7-9

Matthew 18:21-35

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I welcome you all with joy to this Eucharistic celebration

**Peter asks Jesus today a very honest question: "Lord, how many times should I forgive? Seven times?"**

**Seven was already a lot. Peter thought Jesus would praise him. But Jesus says, "Not seven, but seventy times seven." In other words, don't count. Just forgive.**

Forgiveness is not mathematics. It is the heart of God.

I learned this as a small boy. In the early 2000s, I was walking with my late mother. A village boy threw a stone that hit my head. It hurt. I wanted to fight back. I said, "Mama, what should I do to this boy?"

She held my hand and said, "Forgive him, leave him, let us go on our way."

That one sentence became my life lesson: **Forgive him, leave him, go on your way.**

Today that boy is an old man. Whenever I visit home, he greets me with great joy. If I had fought that day, I would have lost a brother.

Brothers and sisters, we all have someone who threw a stone at us - with words, with actions. And we carry that stone in our heart.

We learn three reasons today, why we ought to forgive without limits:

**First, forgiveness FREES you.**

When you don't forgive, you sleep with that person in your heart, you wake up with them, you bring them to church. You are in a prison, and you are the prisoner.

But when you forgive, you are free. You sleep well. You pray well. You celebrate well.

**Second, forgiveness HEALS you.**

Sirach in the first reading says wrath and anger are hateful things. Science confirms it. Unforgiveness raises blood pressure, brings anxiety, depression, and ulcers.

Forgiveness is medicine. It heals your body, your mind, and your friendship with God.

**Third, forgiveness makes you LIKE JESUS.**

On the Cross, in His greatest pain, Jesus did not curse. He prayed, "**Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.**"

He forgave WHILE He was hurting. Not after.

St. John Paul II, after he was shot - (May 13, 1981, at St. Peter's square), went to the prison to forgive his shooter. He said, "Forgiveness is not weakness. It is the highest form of love."

Mother Teresa said, "If we really want to love, we must learn to forgive."

When you forgive, you look exactly like Jesus on the Cross.

In the Gospel today, the king forgave 10,000 talents - a debt no one can pay. That is God forgiving you. But that same servant refused to forgive 100 denarii - a small debt. That is us when we say "I will never forgive him or her."

We cannot receive mercy on Sunday and refuse mercy on Monday.

So here is our challenge this week. It is very simple.

One person. One prayer.

Tonight, before you sleep, think of one person who hurt you. Say from your heart: "I forgive you. I leave you. I go on my way."

You don't even need to call them. Just decide in your heart and pray for them for one minute. That one minute will set you free.

Let us forgive and be set free.

We ask Mother Mary and St. Bavo to pray for us.