



September 13, 2020

Dear Parishioners,

In Christ, God offers us forgiveness of a debt we could never pay – the debt of sin. Our sins, our big and little tantrums of selfishness, are terrible offenses against God. They are direct and violent rebellions against his plan for our lives and for the world around us. The debt of 10,000 talents mentioned in the parable is an image Jesus himself gives of the immensity of the offense that sin causes in God's eyes. But God is always, always, willing to forgive it: there is no limit to his mercy. But we can cut ourselves off from that ever-flowing mercy, and that's what Jesus is warning us about today. When we refuse to forgive the offenses others cause us, we handcuff God's mercy and put ourselves under strict justice.

Earlier in St. Matthew's Gospel, Christ pointed out that *"For as you judge, so will you be judged, and the measure with which you measure will be measured out to you"* (Mt. 7:2). This is the way God has found to unfurl his mercy without compromising his justice; he leaves each person free to choose between the two. If we demand strict justice with others who offend us, we force God to demand strict justice from us – we cut ourselves off from the divine mercy. In this parable, as in the Our Father, Jesus gives us the secret to forming a patient, forgiving heart, so that we won't fall into that trap. It consists in recognizing the immense evil of our own sin, and thereby perceiving the vastness of God's goodness in forgiving it. Until we see how ugly are the ingratitude and selfishness that typically characterize our relationship with God, we will never grasp how generous is his forgiveness. When we do, however, our shriveled hearts expand, and our joyful patience knows no bounds.

Cheryl McGuinness learned this secret of mercy at the foot of a strange and terrible cross. She is the widow of the co-pilot of American Airlines Flight 11, which was hijacked and smashed into the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. That morning, she and her two teenage children cried and suffered at the horrible loss of Tom, her husband. In the midst of her tears, she remembered something that her husband, knowing that a pilot's job is risky, had told her long before: *"If anything ever happens to me, you have to trust God. God will get you through it..."* She took that to heart, but it wasn't easy. A turning point in the process came almost a year after the attack, when she went to Ground Zero. When she arrived to Ground Zero, emotionally stunned, she looked into the pit where the buildings had once stood. As she looked at the remains, her eyes fixed on the only steel structure left standing. It was in the shape of a cross. She kept looking from the pit to the cross and her eyes focused on the cross. She prayed in the silence of her heart, *"Lord, they killed my husband."* Then she seemed to see herself at the foot of another Cross, Christ's cross, on Calvary. She heard God in her heart, inviting her to forgive the terrorists who had committed this atrocity. She asked Him why, and the answer that came into her soul was: *"Because I forgave you."* It was a moment of grace and of spiritual clarity for Cheryl, in which she saw that although she had never committed horrible acts of terrorism, she had indeed committed sins - she had done evil. And Jesus had forgiven her. It was then that she felt the inner strength she hadn't felt before, the strength to forgive her husband's murderers, and it changed the direction of her life. God doesn't ask us to forgive on our own strength, but he gives us the strength

to forgive by forgiving us first: that's the secret to learning Christian mercy. With practice, we can all learn to forgive the little offenses of every day.

It's harder, though, to forgive the big things. Sooner or later, each of us will have to forgive a major offense, maybe even a life-shattering wound inflicted by someone we love dearly. Or we may run into a situation in which we ourselves have committed a sin so grave that we can't seem to forgive ourselves, even though we know God has forgiven us. In these cases, it's much harder to follow Christ's command of limitless mercy, but not impossible. To prepare for that kind of situation, we need to fill our minds with examples of forgiveness and mercy, with the true stories of our brothers and sisters in the faith who have gone before us and learned to follow Christ closely and joyfully. These are the saints. The saints are a like a Hall of Fame for the Church; learning about their lives is like watching NFL "Road to the Super Bowl" videos. The saints weren't born holy. They struggled through all the same temptations and trials that we do. But they struggled victoriously, and that's why the Church names them and puts them before us as examples of life. All the saints learned how to accept and experience God's mercy, and also how to be merciful towards others, though it wasn't always easy.

We all have a favorite saint or two. Why not take some time this week to learn more about them, to read more than just a one-sentence summary of their lives. Let's give them a chance to inspire us, so that we in turn can become true inspirations for others, true models of Christ-like mercy.

May God bless you.

Fr. Dan