

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time, 13 September 2020

Scriptures: Sirach 27:30-28:7; Romans 14:7-9; Matt. 18:21-35

Homily: Fr. Ken

Because of our God-given freedom, it is each of us who can set limits as to what we give and what we forgive. We live in time, and time makes us set limits to what we do and give to each other. Eternity is without limits.

In the first reading from the Book of Sirach, we hear that the cure for bad memories is to remember the things of God.

In the second reading from Paul's Letter to the Christians in Rome, he reminds them that life and death only have meaning when they are lived for something more than just ourselves.

In the Gospel of Matthew, God's word teaches us that there is no limit to forgiveness, because heaven is eternal forgiveness.

So, when St. Peter suggests that we should forgive people if they sin against us "seven times", he is not suggesting just a small number. Rather, seven is the ancient number meaning totality. So, Peter actually thinks he is saying something profound about forgiving. But we forgive while we live. Christ responds to Peter by saying, "Not seven, I tell you, but seventy times seven". This multiplication is because mercy is not just for this life, for the time we have on earth, but also for eternity. So the Gospel story of the servant being led to judgement is our story, because if we do not forgive, how can we enter the world of forgiveness, which is heaven?

The servant in the Gospel parable is asked to act like God toward his fellow servants by forgiving them. It is not just God saying, "I forgave you, therefore you should forgive others", but rather God saying, "I forgive all human persons, but I wish to forgive some of them through you. Their debt to you is yours and theirs, but

the forgiveness is mine, And I want you to be ministers of that forgiveness”.

In our world today, politics, in essence, is the art of helping people to live together; and since all have sinned and owe each other debts that cannot be repaid, the work of politics should be seen as fundamentally a work of mercy and forgiveness.

In offering mercy to the world, Christ has the key to every other good thing in this world. Mercy is not just a medicine to cure a disease of our sin, but it is the divine nature, in the particular situation of our world. By sharing in this mercy, we share in the divine nature. We may or may not remember our sins in heaven; but in the vision of God, we would see that mercy is natural to God, and know that God would always offer forgiveness without reserve.

Thus, any philosophy of life which has no room for mercy has missed the point of life itself. Whatever we believe, we are living as God’s servants among fellow servants. We are called to friendship with God, which is the fulfillment of service on earth. But we do not become friends of God if we refuse to be friends with each other. Forgiveness cannot be forced on us. God offers it, and we are to offer it with God, but it must be accepted. No one will accept forgiveness who does not want to share it with others. So it is that in forgiving we are forgiven. By sharing in mercy, we share in the divine life.