24th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Cycle A

September 16/17, 2017

Sir 27: 30-28:9; Rom 14: 7-9; Matt 18: 21-35

We heard in the Old Testament reading: “Forgive your neighbor’s injustice; then when you pray, your own sins will be forgiven.” (Sir 28:2) Then, in the Gospel which I just proclaimed, Jesus tells us that not only must we forgive others, but we must forgive over and over again, always showing mercy, and the penalty for not doing so is quite severe.

Challenging for all of us to say the least! Jesus is asking a lot from us, but it is the mark of a true Christian to forgive and to show mercy. In fact, it is awfully hard to call yourself a Catholic Christian if you do not forgive, if you are not merciful, if you carry anger and revenge in your heart. The world is so full of anger and revenge, so unforgiving it seems, and Jesus expects more from us. So, we must ask ourselves the question, “How can I do what Jesus is asking me to do? What are the ways?”

Centuries ago, St. John Damascene said there were five ways to forgive and to be forgiven.

The first way is **the way of confession**. We must admit and confess our own sins, to prepare us to forgive others. Going to confession is sufficient for God to free us from our sins*. It also helps us become more* *merciful to others*. It is good for our souls and it is good for the world because it frees us to become merciful to others. Monthly confession is good for everyone.

The second way is **the way of decision**. What I mean is, making a conscious decision, and intentional deliberate decision to forgive others who have harmed us, even if we don’t feel very forgiving. This is difficult because we have to face our anger and our desire for raw justice. When we are filled with anger, it is nearly impossible to forgive others or to be merciful. So when we decide to forgive, the first thing we face is our anger, hurt, and fear. Jesus said that if we want to receive mercy and forgiveness, we must be willing to forgive others.

The third way is **the way of prayer**. Prayer from where? From the heart. If you have no other way at any particular time in your life, no opportunity for confession, not being able to show mercy because of the depth of your hurt and anger, then drop to your knees and beg God for a forgiving heart and a merciful attitude. Beg God! Prayer from the heart reconciles us to God and to each other.

The fourth way is **the way of almsgiving**. You cannot buy your way into heaven, but giving alms is an act of mercy. We are merciful when we give to the needy. We atone for our sins when we take care of the poor. When we give alms, we are giving to Jesus who lives in the poor. It is an act of reconciliation.

The fifth way is **the way of humility**. Be humble before God and others. Humble yourself before God and your conscience will be free from the weight of your sins and you will be more merciful to others. It is easier when we are humble. It frees you from pride, which is the root of all sin. Remember the Gospel story of the publican and the Pharisee? The publican or tax collector knelt in the back of the temple, beating his chest and praying, “Be merciful to me, a sinner.” The Pharisee was up front, praying God and recounting all he did to follow the laws of his religion. Who went home forgiven? Who experience God’s mercy? It was the humble one, not the Pharisee.

Confession; forgiving others; praying from the heart; almsgiving; humility. Which of these ways do you need to work on in your life?

Do you need to use the Sacrament of Reconciliation more frequently?

Do you need to work on being more forgiving because of the anger in your heart?

Do you need to pray more from your heart, or do you ignore your need for prayer and a relationship with God?

Do you need to be more generous with the poor, or are you like the ungrateful debtor in today’s Gospel?

Are you humble before God and others, or are you locked in pride?

A true Christian knows mercy and forgiveness by being merciful to others, by being humble, by acknowledging his own sins, by sharing what he has with others, and by praying constantly from the heart. These are the marks of a disciple of Jesus Christ. These are the ways we are reconciled with God and others. These are the roads to heaven. They are gifts from God, and we must use them.