



PARISH OF ST. AGATHA
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**POPE FRANCIS SAYS:
 FORGIVENESS AND MERCY HELPS AVOID SUFFERING AND WARS.**

Pope Francis reflects on Matthew's Gospel (18:21-35) of the parable of the unmerciful servant, saying if we do not strive to forgive and love, neither we will be forgiven and loved. Pope Francis is urging Christians to imitate God's merciful attitude, saying the world could be spared much suffering and many wounds and wars if forgiveness and mercy were "the style of our life." The Pope reflected on the parable of the unmerciful servant. A master forgives a servant's enormous loan when he pleaded for time to repay it. But when that servant came across another fellow servant who owed him only a modest amount, he had his fellow servant thrown into prison. Coming to know about it, the master punishes the unmerciful servant. "How much suffering, how many wounds, how many wars could be avoided if forgiveness and mercy were the style of our life!"

JUSTICE PERVADED [SPREAD] BY MERCY

Reflecting on the parable, Pope Francis drew attention to God's attitude, represented by the king, and that of the human person, represented by the servant. "The divine attitude is justice pervaded with mercy," he said, "whereas the human attitude is limited to justice." The Pope said Jesus urges us to open ourselves courageously to the power of forgiveness, because "not everything in life can be resolved by justice". The need for merciful love, the Pope explained, is also the answer Jesus gives to Peter, who asked Jesus how many times he should forgive someone who sins against him. "In the symbolic language of the Bible this means that we are called to forgive always," the Pope explained.

MERCY IN HUMAN SITUATIONS

The Holy Father reflected: "It is necessary to apply merciful love to all human relationships: between spouses, between parents and children, within our communities and also in society and politics."

In off the cuff remarks, Pope Francis shared how he was touched by a line from the First Reading from the Sunday's Liturgy from the Book of Sirach [Ecclesiasticus]: "Remember your last days, set enmity aside". He said that resentment and hatred from past offences can continue to bother us like a fly. "Forgiving is not something momentary, it is something that we continue doing against that resentment, that hatred that keeps coming back." But thinking about our last days helps us put an end to that endless cycle, he said.

CALL TO FORGIVE IN THE "OUR FATHER"

This parable, the Pope said helps us to grasp fully the meaning of the phrase in the "Our Father": "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" (see Mt 6:12). These words, Pope Francis said, contain a decisive truth: "We cannot demand God's forgiveness for ourselves if we in turn do not grant forgiveness to our neighbour. If we do not strive to forgive and to love, we will not be forgiven and loved either." In conclusion, Pope Francis urged everyone to entrust themselves to the Mother of God so that they may realise how much they are in debt to God and open their hearts to mercy and goodness. (Vatican News).

TO BE FORGIVEN BY GOD, WE MUST FORGIVE

Almighty God is like a Spiritual Creditor, because we owe Him for our whole existence and the gift of Eternal Life after death. When we sin against God and each other, we ruthlessly show our ingratitude towards His Goodness. Because of this, we create an outstanding debt resulting in us living subject to His Divine Mercy. None of us can repay the debt we owe Him, without asking for His Mercy. This is done in the Confession. In today's Gospel (Mt 18:21-35), Jesus talks about a man who owed his master and king a huge amount of money (talents), but *had no means to pay it back. The servant threw himself down at his master's feet. "Give me time" he said "and I will pay the whole sum." The servant's master felt so sorry for him that he let him go and cancelled the debt.*

MERCY GRANTED WILL BE PAID BACK BY MERCY

The same servant, who had been shown great mercy by his master, meets *a fellow servant* on the way out, who owed him a small amount of money. The fellow servant was not in a position to pay him and begged *for more time* to repay it back. However, the fellow, who had just been forgiven his own debt was not prepared to extend his good fortune or the mercy shown to him, to anyone else who owed him. He ruthlessly and selfishly showed no mercy or compassion and *had him thrown into prison till he should pay the debt.* Jesus called this hardness of heart *wicked* because *he did not imitate the merciful cancellation of debt that he received. The master handed the unmerciful servant over to the torturers till he should pay all his debt. And that is how My heavenly Father will deal with you unless you each forgive your brother from your heart.'*

DARE TO LIVE BY THE MERCIFUL SPIRIT OF GOD

Before we pray the *Our Father* in every Mass, the Priest is obliged to introduce it by saying; *At the Saviour's Command and formed by Divine Teaching, we DARE to say.* The *dare* challenges us to put into action, from our heart, exactly what we pray with our lips, to; *Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.* Jesus commands us to *overlook the offence* in the spirit of mercy. We should not be surprised if Divine Mercy is denied to us on our Judgement Day, if we denied it to others in our lifetime. **God's Love is unconditional but His Mercy is conditional.** We must forgive without holding a grudge or cherish resentment. The First Reading today (Ecclesiasticus 27:33-28:9), tells us that, *resentment and anger are foul things* and are only found in sinners. It tells us that the person who *nurses anger against another, cannot expect or demand compassion from God.* It tells us that *people who exact (demands) Vengeance will experience Vengeance from the Lord, who keeps strict account of sin.*

STOP HATING AND NURSING ANGER

God insists that we live by the **Ten Commandments** and love one another. To forgive each other's faults and weaknesses. To pray for our enemy and *not bear our neighbour any ill-will, but to overlook the offence, for the sake of the Covenant of Love, who is Christ.* We can only do this by the Grace of God. Our Lady is the Vessel of God's Grace and we should ask her every day to pour that merciful and loving Grace into our heart to enable us to fulfil God's command to forgive and forget. God informs us that to, *forgive our neighbour the hurt they do us, and when we pray, our sins will be forgiven.* To grant forgiveness is a divine power granted to us by God, but to harbour hatred and resentment is an evil weakness instilled into our heart by the Devil.

PRISON OF PURGATORY FOR THE HARD SOUL

To not forgive or reject an apology is destructive to the soul and robs us of our interior Peace. To forgive can entail a process, a work in progress, that sometimes needs revisiting in our hearts. To forgive is to heal our heart and the other persons too. Jesus asks us to forgive, as He does, even if it appears to be unjustifiable. We are to practice unlimited forgiveness like God. Jesus speaks of a prison that the debtor was thrown into until his debt was paid. This refers to the Prison of Purgatory where God, who is represented in the Gospel parable as the king and master, sentences the non-repentant sinner for a period of penitential hard time, when he will be eventually released after the outstanding debt is paid in full to Him. These are the souls who at some point in their lives showed mercy. Other souls nursing unconditional anger and lacking forgiveness completely will be sent to another Prison called Hell, which is a life sentence in Darkness. The merciful will live with the Merciful God in the eternity of Light. God bless, Fr. Brendan.