

Sunday, September 13, 2020

Lectionary 24, Year A

Introduction

In today's second reading Paul questions why we judge one another, since we all stand before the judgment of God. Yet we do sin against one another, and Jesus' challenge that we forgive seventy-seven times reveals God's boundless mercy. When we hear the words of forgiveness in worship and sign ourselves with the cross, we are renewed in baptism to be signs of reconciliation in the world.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Happy are those whose transgression is forgotten.

Forgive one another, as you have been forgiven.

Happy are those in whose spirit there is no deceit.

Forgive one another, as you have been forgiven.

Whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

Forgive one another, as you have been forgiven.

Confession and Forgiveness

Blessed be the holy Trinity, ✝ one God, who creates, redeems, and sustains us and all of creation. **Amen.**

Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

Silence is kept for reflection.

Faithful God, have mercy on us. We confess that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves. We turn from your loving embrace and go our own ways. We pass judgment on one another before examining ourselves. We place our own needs before those of our neighbors. We keep your gift of salvation to ourselves. Make us humble, cast away our transgressions, and turn us again to life in you through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

God hears the cries of all who call out in need, and through his death and resurrection, Christ has made us his own. Hear the truth that God proclaims:

Your sins are forgiven in the name of ✝ Jesus Christ. Led by the Holy Spirit, live in freedom and newness to do God's work in the world. **Amen.**

Prayer of the Day

O Lord God, merciful judge, you are the inexhaustible fountain of forgiveness. Replace our hearts of stone with hearts that love and adore you, that we may delight in doing your will, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

First Reading: Genesis 50:15-21

After Jacob's death the brothers of Joseph begged for forgiveness for the crime they had done against him. You intended to do me harm, Joseph said, but God used this as an opportunity to do good and save many lives.

¹⁵Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, "What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?" ¹⁶So they approached Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this instruction before he died, ¹⁷'Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you.' Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. ¹⁸Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, "We are here as your slaves." ¹⁹But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? ²⁰Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. ²¹So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones." In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

Psalm: Psalm 103:[1-7] 8-13

¹Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless God's holy name.

²**Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all God's benefits—**

³who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases;

⁴**who redeems your life from the grave and crowns you with steadfast love and mercy;**

⁵who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like an eagle's.

⁶**O LORD, you provide vindication and justice for all who are oppressed.**

⁷You made known your ways to Moses and your works to the children of Israel.

⁸**LORD, you are full of compassion and mercy,**

slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love;

⁹you will not always accuse us, nor will you keep your anger forever.

¹⁰**You have not dealt with us according to our sins,**

nor repaid us according to our iniquities.

¹¹For as the heavens are high above the earth,

so great is your steadfast love for those who fear you.

¹²**As far as the east is from the west,**

so far have you removed our transgressions from us.

¹³As a father has compassion for his children,

so you have compassion for those who fear you, O LORD.

Second Reading: Romans 14:1-12

This Christian community has significant struggles with diversity. Here Paul helps us understand that despite different practices in worship and personal piety, we do not judge one another. All Christians belong to the Lord Jesus Christ who died for all of us and will judge each of us.

¹Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. ²Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables.

³Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. ⁴Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

⁵Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. ⁶Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God.

⁷We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. ⁸If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. ⁹For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

¹⁰Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. ¹¹For it is written,

“As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.” ¹²So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

Gospel: Matthew 18:21-35

When Peter asks about the limits of forgiveness, Jesus responds with a parable that suggests human forgiveness should mirror the unlimited mercy of God.

²¹Peter came and said to [Jesus], “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” ²²Jesus said to

him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

²³“For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; ²⁵and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. ²⁶So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ ²⁷And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, ‘Pay what you owe.’ ²⁹Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ ³⁰But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. ³¹When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. ³²Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?’ ³⁴And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. ³⁵So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

Prayers of Intercession

Pastor: We pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

A brief silence.

Leader: How easily we keep a record of wrongs against us and hold them long after most others have forgotten. Turn us back to the wonder of your amazing grace and fill us with a desire to move forward in faith, freedom, and forgiveness. Merciful God,

Hear our prayer.

Leader: The earth renews itself and creation is forgiving of the ills perpetrated upon it. Hold us accountable to the charge of caring responsibly for all that you have made and keep us mindful of the consequences of our actions. Merciful God,

Hear our prayer.

Leader: We move our clocks and reorder our days, yet you remain the same forever, and hold all things in your hands. Give us a glimpse of eternity in your Spirit’s unfailing presence with us and tune our hearts to your song of grace which spans the ages. Merciful God,

Hear our prayer.

Pastor: There is healing in letting go, O Lord. May we discover the power there is in forgiveness: restoring relationships with you, ourselves, and others. We lift up in prayer today (especially...). Merciful God,

Hear our prayer.

Leader: Blessed are all your faithful servants of every time and place. May we see the contemporary saints among us today, quietly doing your work and bringing about your kingdom. Count us also among them, as we strive to faithfully serve you all our days. Merciful God,

Hear our prayer.

Here other petitions may be offered.

Pastor: Receive our prayers of thanksgiving, our requests for pardon, and our longing for healing, O Lord. Hold us together in your wide embrace. For the sake of Jesus. **Amen.**

Offering Prayer

Blessed are you, O God, maker of all things. You have set before us these gifts of your good creation. Prepare us for your heavenly banquet, nourish us with this rich food and drink,

and send us forth to set tables in the midst of a suffering world, through the bread of life, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

Blessing

Mothering God, Father, † Son, and Holy Spirit,
bless you and lead you into the way of truth and life. **Amen.**

Dismissal

Go in peace. Remember the poor. **Thanks be to God.**