

ctkAlive! Scripture Reflection
24th Sunday in Ordinary Time
2023—A Cycle Readings



What Do I See?

The theme of this weekend's scriptures is *forgiveness*. In the above photo, we see more than a warm embrace between two people who are obviously dear to each other. We're not sure who is seeking reconciliation. Perhaps it is mutual.

If I made up my own story about this moment, what would it be? How would I start my story? What words would I put in these two peoples' mouths? Do I see myself in this image? How? At what point in my life?

"[Forgiveness](#)" a photo by [Gus Moretta](#), used with permission via [Unsplash.com](#)

Opening Prayer

(edited, adapted, and abridged for use here)

Merciful Lord,

St. Paul teaches: *"Let the peace that comes from Christ rule in our hearts"* (Colossians 3: 15).

When I forgive, allow your Spirit
to fill my heart with peace...
the peace that only comes from you.

Above all, I am thankful.

Thank you for reminding me
to always be grateful.

With gratitude, I draw closer to you...
and let go of unforgiveness.

With gratitude... let me now recall a person
who caused me pain.

(pause)

Let me find my inner compassion...
including true forgiveness...
and experience the freedom of forgiveness.
I pray this in your holy name....
Amen.

by [Kristine Brown](#)

author of [Over It: Conquering Comparison to Live Out God's Plan](#) and founder of the nonprofit organization, [More Than Yourself, Inc.](#) Kristine writes about her God-story to help others discover their own.

Scripture Readings

Book of Sirach (27: 30 to 28: 7) "O grudge and wrath, these are abominations in which sinful people excel."

Psalms 103 (1-4, 9-12) "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all my being, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all your benefits."

Romans 14: 7-9 "No one lives for oneself, and no one dies for oneself. For if we live, we live for the Lord; if we die, we die for the Lord."

Matthew 18: 21-35 "Peter approached Jesus and asked him, 'Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive? As many as seven times?'"

Introduction to the 24th Sunday of Ordinary Time

At some moment in our lives, we have all been emotionally hurt/betrayed by another—perhaps even by a trusted friend or family member. And, yes, we are all guilty of hurting/betraying someone, someone close to us. Forgiveness dominates as the theme of this week's readings. We all pray that our God will forgive us, but this weekend's Scriptures remind us that forgiveness is a two-sided coin.

The Jewish sage, Sirach, wrote in chapters 27 and 28 that reconciliation is incomplete when all we say are the words, "I forgive you." Actions can betray our spoken words. Sirach called for flesh-and-blood pardon and compassion among his fellow Jews. He ended the passage with, "*Remember* your end and give up hatred. *Keep in mind* your final corruption in the grave and keep the commandments. *Remember* the commandments and do not bear grudges against your neighbor. *Remember* the Covenant with the Most High and overlook the offense."

"Remember..." "keep in mind"... "remember"... and "remember." Do we get it, yet?

In Romans 14: 7-9, Paul reminded both Jewish and pagan converts of their equality in baptism. Their conversion to Christ makes them one body... not Jewish Christians, not Roman (pagan) Christians. Nor should anyone claim, "We found Jesus first, so that makes us better than you."

This weekend's gospel (Matthew 18: 21-25), offers a vivid example of Christian life on the verge of "going sour." The evangelist wrote, "Peter approached Jesus and asked him, 'Lord, if my brother sins against me, *how often must I forgive?*'" In other words, when can I *stop* forgiving and still be blameless in God's sight?

Matthew elaborated for his mid-1st century audience Jesus' teaching about how to live a Christian life within their local faith communities. Here we have a vivid expansion of what Jesus first taught in the Lord's prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

Note: Later in this reflection, we will recommend listening to Bishop Robert Barron's teaching on forgiveness. If you wish to get a head start, you may prefer to watch it now.

A Reading from the Book of Sirach (27: 30 to 28: 7)

"O grudge and wrath, these also are abominations in which sinful people excel. Don't bear grudges. He who demands revenge will suffer the vengeance of the Lord who keeps a strict account of his sins. Forgive the mistakes of your neighbor then you may ask that your sins be forgiven.

"If a man bears resentment against another, how can he ask God for healing? If he has no compassion for others, how can he pray for forgiveness for his sins? As long as he, mere flesh, is resentful, who will obtain his pardon?

"Remember your end... and give up hatred; keep in mind your final corruption in the grave... and keep the commandments. Remember the commandments... and do not bear grudges against your neighbor. Remember the Covenant with the Most High... and overlook the offense."

Personal Reflection

Originally written in Hebrew ca. 180-175 BC/BCE, the author's grandson (unnamed) translated the book into Greek (the common language of most people) fifty years later. This book goes by *two* names: Sirach and Ecclesiasticus (not the other book titled Ecclesiastes). The first title recalls its author, Jesus son of Sirach. The alternate title refers more to its welcome and acceptance by Christians in apostolic times (1st c. AD/CE). This book stands as the epitome of practical wisdom. It elaborates on faithful living even more clearly than the Book of Proverbs.

Recalling a time in my life when I nursed an angry grudge against someone...

— *what was it about? How did I feel inside myself during that time? Does it still lurk in some dark place in my mind.. my body... my spirit? If I have overcome it... how did I finally let go of it?*

— *How difficult is it for me to link my own pleas for God's forgiveness with my willingness to forgive those "difficult people" in my life? What needs to change inside of me to make forgiveness complete and sincere?*

Responsorial: Psalm 103 (1-4, 9-12)

In praise of God's love

*The Lord is kind and merciful,
slow to anger and rich in compassion.*

Praise the Lord, O my soul!
With all that is within me, praise his holy name!
Praise the Lord, O my soul!
Do not forget all his kind deeds!
*The Lord is kind and merciful,
slow to anger and rich in compassion.*

He is the one who forgives all your sins,
who heals all your diseases,
who delivers your life from the Pit,
who crowns you with his loyal love and compassion,
He does not always accuse,
and does not stay angry.
*The Lord is kind and merciful,
slow to anger and rich in compassion.*

He does not deal with us as our sins deserve;
he does not repay us as our misdeeds deserve.
For as the skies are high above the earth,
so his loyal love towers over his faithful followers.
As far as the eastern horizon is from the west,
he removes the guilt of our rebellious actions from us.
*The Lord is kind and merciful,
slow to anger and rich in compassion.*

Personal Reflection

Like the psalmists of old, we Christians live with the joyful paradox that our God is higher than the heavens, and yet, is close to us in love and mercy. Our gratitude for divine mercy flows naturally into a hymn of praise for God's greatness. When we think how great our God is, we do not dwell on how *far away* God is, but how much God loves us to come to us in our earthly home.

Our God is a Father full of mercy. New Testament examples come to mind. The prodigal son (Luke 15: 11-32) and the prayer of Jesus on the cross, "Father forgive them...." (Luke 23: 34). And Romans 8: 31: "The Father did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all." These reveal the depth of God's love, mercy and forgiveness. Let us praise the Lord, both in moments of joy, as well as in hours of sadness... at

times when we have strength... and at others when we live in humble awareness of our fragility.

— *How do I measure up when it comes to having compassion for someone who has “done me wrong”? In what areas of my life and relationships—today—do I need to apply Yahweh’s understanding and acceptance of human weakness?*

— *What can I do (yes, “little old me”) to help heal the brokenness, rancor, and deep divisions that swirl around me today—within myself and in my close relationships?*

A Reading from the Letter of St. Paul to the Romans (14: 7-9)

“None of us lives for himself and no one dies for himself. If we live, we live for the Lord; if we die, we die for the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s. For this reason Christ died and returned to life, so that he may be the Lord of both the dead and the living.”

Personal Reflection

Paul teaches us that Jesus died for our sins and keeps “coming back” across the *two millennia* since that first Good Friday to win the hearts of people—to win *my* heart. Paul is saying to me, “Not everything’s *about* you! But it does include you.”

— *Today, how does my Christian life in real-world America measure up to the Apostle’s model of selflessness? On a “selflessness” scale of 1-10 (10 being the highest), how would I grade myself?*

— *What is my attitude toward people of other faith communities (Orthodox, Protestant [all denominations], Jewish, Eastern religions? Do I feel sorry for those who have not inherited or converted to what I believe is the one true faith community? Or do I see them as equals in our common search for and love of God?*

The Gospel According to Matthew (18: 21-35)

“Peter came to Jesus and said, ‘Lord, how many times must I forgive my brother who sins against me? As many as seven times?’

“Jesus said to him, ‘Not seven times, I tell you, but seventy-seven times! For this reason, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his slaves. As he began settling his accounts, a man who owed ten thousand talents was brought to him. Because he was not able to repay it, the lord ordered him to be sold, along with his wife, children, and whatever he possessed, and repayment to be made. Then the slave threw himself to the ground before him, saying, “Be patient with me, and I will repay you everything.” The lord had compassion on that slave and released him and forgave him the debt.

“After he went out, that same slave found one of his fellow slaves who owed him one hundred silver coins. So he grabbed him by the throat and started to choke him, saying, ‘Pay back what you owe me!’

“Then his fellow slave threw himself down and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will repay you.’

“But he refused. Instead, he went out and threw him in prison until he repaid the debt. When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were upset. They went to their master and told him everything that had taken place.

“Then his lord called the first slave and said to him, ‘Evil slave! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me! Should you not have shown mercy to your fellow slave, just as I showed it to you?’ And in anger his lord turned him over to the prison guards to torture him until he repaid all he owed.

“‘So also my heavenly Father will do to you, if each of you does not forgive your brother from your heart.’”

Personal Reflection

In the Jewish culture of the time, a large amount of debt had to be repaid [in cash or in personal service](#) to the lender. In terms of this gospel, the massive debt of the slave amounted to a lifetime of indentured service.

In this passage, Jesus challenges each of us to reexamine our conscience. Let’s pause and dig until we find those dark places tucked away within ourselves where we harbor bitter feelings that we justify because people who wrongly harmed us, physically, psychologically, and/or spiritually at some stage in our lives as children, teens, young adults, or in our senior years. These may have been intentional or not, but they left permanent scars, if not on our bodies, then in the deep recesses of our psyches. To be faithful to this week’s gospel message, we cannot be spiritually healed and made whole until we do forgive those who injured us.

— *With which part of this passage and parable do I most identify: the king, the forgiven servant, the poor man that two-faced servant punished? Why?*

— *What physical, psychological, or spiritual pain do I still nurse from the past and am unwilling to let go of? What change of attitude do I hear Jesus nudging me to make today?*

— *How resistant am I to saying, “Yes,” to Jesus’ call in this gospel reminder to empty my spirit—not of the indelible memory of past abuse but empty myself of the need to nurture my hurt and harden my heart?*

For Inspirational Listening and Watching

Listen

Don’t miss this! Before the song, “[Forgiveness](#)” composed and sung by [Matthew West](#)

A grieving mother offers her heart-rending testimony about losing one of her adult twin daughters in an automobile accident triggered by a drunk driver. The young man received a sentence of 22 years in prison. The mother of the deceased forgave the man, befriended him, and went to court to petition a reduction of his sentence to 11 years. The judge granted her request. An inspiring true story about this week's scripture theme... forgiveness.

Watch

Take 10 minutes to listen to [Bishop Robert Barron's](#) talk on "[Anger and Forgiveness](#)." He uses this week's gospel passage, Matthew 18: 21-25, to separate the feeling of anger from the sin of anger. He goes on to explain how forgiveness is possible, even in the presence of unforgettable memories of past hurts.

"[Les Misérables](#)" by [Victor Hugo](#)—the "Back to God" scene from a 2012 film adaptation (4 min.)

Bishop Myriel sets Jean Valjean free from the police and from his own miserable life-path. This short clip captures the key moment of conversion on which the entire novel/story turns.

Journaling Prompts

Based on this weekend's Scripture readings, what does the Jesus ask me to do TODAY regarding... (1) the quality of the love I bring to my personal relationships... and (2) my life as an emissary of Christ, committed to bringing God's love to the people with whom I interact in person and on social media?

Who needs to receive from me this week a moment of laughter and personal concern? Why do I hesitate?

In light of this weekend's Scriptures, take some time to write about events occurring in your life this week and what you see happening in the world.

Preview of Next Weekend's Scriptures

Readings for the 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 55: 6-9 "Seek the Lord while he may be found."

Psalms 145: 2-3, 8-9, 17-18 "The Lord is gracious and merciful; slow to anger, rich in kindness."

Letter of St. Paul to the Philippians 1: 20-24, 27 "For me Christ is life and death is gain."

Matthew 20: 1-16 (Parable of the generous employer) “Summon the laborers and give them their pay.”

Closing Prayer

(edited, abridged, and adapted for use here)

Prayer of Repentance

Lord Jesus,
give me a heart that is humble.
Send your Spirit of Truth,
that I may know who I am to you.
Take away from my heart...
all self-righteousness...
and self-centeredness.
Give me, Lord, a heart generous enough
to remove pride... jealousy... envy...
anger... hatred... revenge...
and any lack of mercy and kindness.
Give me a heart that thinks and speaks well of others,
that rejoices in others' success.
Lord change my heart.
Give me a heart like yours.
Amen.

Source: [Lord Calls](#)

Gender usage in these reflections: We are conscious of gender references to God the Scripture texts. Often, attempts to rewrite these passages result in awkward sentence structures. We have left the biblical translations as they are but do our best to be inclusive in all other parts of the reflection.

Note: Some internet links endure online, others come and go. If a link fails, the owner of the site may have taken it down.

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