Peter asked, “Lord, how often must I forgive? As many as seven times?”

Matthew 18:21
**Saint John Chrysostom** (c. 344-407)

September 13

“Speaking truth to power” may have become just another cliché, but doing precisely that cost John “the Golden Mouth” (Chrysostom) his diocese and, after exile and a forced march, his health and life. “Renowned for eloquence, heroic in suffering” (Sacramentary), John’s scriptural insights still comfort and challenge. Mystical theologian, he bids Eastern Christians, whose principal Divine Liturgy bears his name, to lift up their hearts to “God ineffable, beyond comprehension, invisible, beyond understanding, existing forever, always the same.” Model pastor, he warns Roman Catholics in the Liturgy of the Hours not to neglect God-in-the-flesh: “Would you honor Christ’s body? Do not scorn his nakedness, honoring him here in church with silken robes, while neglecting him cold and naked outside. What use to burden Christ’s altar with golden chalices, while Christ himself starves to death? What use dressing the altar with gold-woven clothes, while denying the shivering Christ the clothes he needs? Do not adorn the church while ignoring your needy brother: he is the most precious temple of all!” (Saturday, Twenty-first Week in Ordinary Time).

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**Forgiveness**

Nearly ten years before, a son and father had parted ways when the business they shared went bankrupt. The son blamed the father. They did not speak to each other again. Then the father became seriously ill. The mother called the son and told him he had better come soon. The son walked sheepishly into the hospital room. The father motioned his son to him and whispered: “Did you ever think you could do anything that would keep me from loving you?”

Resentment and anger are foul things, the first reading from Sirach tells us. Remember the last things. Stop hating. Live by the commandments. As St. Paul writes to the Romans, we are to live for the Lord and die for the Lord.

Jesus’ parable in today’s Gospel reminds us of God’s compassion. The immense sin of humanity has been forgiven and stricken from the record. We are to forgive others in the same way.

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**Readings for the Week**

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<td>Nm 21:4b-9; Ps 78:1-2, 34-38; Phil 2:6-11; Jn 3:13-17</td>
<td>1 Cor 12:12-14, 27-31a; Ps 100:1b-5; Jn 19:25-27 or Lk 2:33-35</td>
<td>1 Cor 12:31 — 13:13; Ps 33:2-5, 12, 22; Lk 7:31-35</td>
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**Today’s Readings**

First Reading — Remember the commandments and hate not your neighbor (Sirach 27:30 — 28:7).

Psalm — The Lord is kind and merciful, slow to anger, and rich in compassion (Psalm 103).

Second Reading — Whether we live, or whether we die, we do so for the Lord (Romans 14:7-9).

Gospel — Forgive one another from your heart (Matthew 18:21-35).

“You missed the point,” we might be tempted to shout at the servant in today’s Gospel. His master had just forgiven a huge debt when he cried for mercy, and yet, when given the opportunity to show mercy himself, he instead acted violently and with retribution toward a fellow servant. Certainly, he had missed the point of his master’s merciful actions toward him, and suffered the consequences as a result. He missed the point. He is not alone, however. We all “miss the point” sometimes—we miss the point of God’s enduring covenant of love, and miss the mark in our call to live as though we are the Lord’s, for this is who we are.

Becoming More Like Christ
When Peter asked Jesus how many times he must forgive, he was probably stunned at Jesus’ response. Peter had asked, “As many as seven times?” Seven being the perfect number, surely this is enough forgiveness, Peter likely thought. Jesus’ response seems lavish beyond proportion. “I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times.” Jesus understands the fullness of God’s mercy and teaches that disciples are called to this same lavish outpouring of mercy. God showers compassion on humanity, beyond what might seem sensible or wise, yet we are called to “remember the Most High’s covenant, and overlook faults,” to give others the benefit of the doubt, knowing that God does this and more with us, each and every day. As recipients of God’s compassion, we must extend forgiveness and care beyond what might seem reasonable, because God’s love is beyond human reason.

How Much Is Too Much?
All this might seem just too much for us. It is one thing to recognize God’s enduring covenant love. It is another to grasp that we are called to the same sort of lavishness in mercy and forgiveness ourselves. Saint Paul helps us put this in perspective. We no longer live for ourselves, but for the Lord. In life and death, we belong to God and are called to be witnesses to God’s love, even in the most challenging circumstances. A friend turns away from us; we are called to turn toward the friend with mercy. A co-worker hurts us; we are called to approach him or her with forgiveness, seventy-seven times no less! God’s love is always about what is just and right. As God’s people, we live and die for the Lord, forgive even when it doesn’t make sense to do so, and leave the rest in God’s hands.

Sir 27:30 — 28:7; Ps 103:1–2, 3–4, 9–10, 11–12; Rom 14:7–9; Mt 18:21–35

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WHY IS IT?
A man wakes up after sleeping under an ADVERTISED blanket on an ADVERTISED mattress and pulls off ADVERTISED pajamas, bathes in an ADVERTISED shower, shaves with an ADVERTISED razor, brushes his teeth with ADVERTISED toothpaste, washes with ADVERTISED soap, puts on ADVERTISED clothes, drinks a cup of ADVERTISED coffee, drives to work in an ADVERTISED car, and then . . . refuses to ADVERTISE believing it doesn’t pay. Later if business is poor he ADVERTISES it for sale.

WHY IS IT?