

Message from Robin+

*Peter 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?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.*

*"For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, 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. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But 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.' Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart." Matthew 18:21-35*

Forgiveness is something we are commanded to do as Christians, yet it can be so difficult. In our Gospel lesson for this week, Jesus puts no limits on forgiveness, in fact, he expands it to infinity and makes it a prerequisite for the kingdom of heaven. When we think of that person whom we have the hardest time forgiving, this can be disheartening. I suspect part of what Jesus was saying is that it is going to take us a lifetime of practicing forgiveness before we become anything close to good at it, or close to understanding the benefit of forgiveness. Our work must involve recognizing those times when we have not been very forgiving, even as we expect forgiveness from others.

Teachers and students everywhere are engaging in a group project on forgiveness as they venture back to school in all its pandemic variations this week. Many colleges and universities have already begun this project and some were immediately faced with problems to solve.

We might not have school age children or children at all, but this group project has a ripple effect whose waves will eventually touch us in some way, sooner or later. Parents are stressed and worried and second guessing their decisions about school for their children. Some do not have the luxury of staying at home to supervise at home learning, others cannot afford internet access, still others have special needs children for whom online learning is just not going to work. Grandparents are helping out, which puts them at risk health wise, and totally changes their schedules. Parents are shuffling around their work schedules as they are able. Other workers are affected when a parent cannot be in the office, and work production may suffer.

All of us are in need of some forgiveness, and all of us are in need of some practice in forgiving others. As this pandemic continues to change the way we do things in every aspect of our lives, may we be resilient, may we be open to doing things in new ways, and may we practice forgiveness with patience and love.