

## Bishop's Reflection – 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday

If there is one thing the Church needs to rediscover, both institutionally and in each one of her members, is the gift of forgiveness. When it comes to sin, every human being and institution is implicated. When it comes to forgiveness, we all need it. When it comes to forgiving, everyone is called to participate.

And yet, “who am I to tell (or ask) you to forgive?” I struggle with forgiveness as much as anyone else. I even struggle with the idea of receiving forgiveness, both from myself and from others. I can only recommend that we follow Simon Peter's lead, by turning to the Lord. If God, in his goodness came to forgive our sins, so too he will show us how to forgive one another.

I like Simon Peter's gutsy intro when he places his question before the Lord; he is willing to be generous (going well beyond the traditional “three strikes and you're out”), but within reason. He is not ready to remove all the limits he has placed on forgiveness. Little does he know that Christ will ask him to reconsider any and all limitations he has placed on his willingness to forgive.

Notice that our biggest struggles tend to come when we bring them before God, a God who is rich in mercy and slow to anger, who invites us to participate in his ministry of healing and reconciliation in the world. How can we compare God's willingness to forgive to any gesture that we are asked to make? The parable compares the two by putting the man's debt of 200,000 years of salaried work up against his fellow slave's debt of three months of salaried work. The contrasting numbers are literally meant to bring a smile to our faces. They are not in same ballpark. It is as if the man is carrying the debt of the entire human race on his shoulders.

The response of the king is astonishing. He doesn't just give the man more time, as if he can repay such an astronomical sum, but he forgives the debt entirely. Imagine the burden that is lifted from the man's shoulders. Most people would have thrown a big party, sparing no expense. This truth itself begs the question, “As Christians, do we show any outward sign that we are forgiven?”

Surprisingly, the man remains unmoved. Having enjoyed the biggest windfall in his life, greater than any lottery or fluke inheritance, he not only demands immediate repayment on a loan that is owed him, but commits violence in the process. In so doing, he not only demeans his fellow slave, he is made the lesser by carrying out the assaulting. In this example, we see our own lives laid bare.

Let's face it, three months salary is no small sum. The hurt and pain we suffer in this life may also seem quite large at times. But what has it done to us? How has it changed us? How do we allow anger and bitterness to take residence in us to the point that we lash out and wish harm on those around us? An anger and bitterness that grows, rather than diminishes, as time goes by.

Notice the reaction of the king. He, too, is angry, but not for the abuse he has suffered, but for what has been done to the fellow slave. He tells the man, “You had an obligation.” Most of us don't like the king's choice of words. After all we talk about “our obligation” (i.e. our Sunday obligation) as something we do somewhat reluctantly (if, at all), as if it was done more as a debt repayment, than a part of our joy in sharing in so great a gift.

In today's readings we are asked to come to terms with the place of forgiveness in our lives. We come before the Lord, the foot of his cross, to celebrate the greatest gift; we are left with God's words: "Share in my generosity and joy, then share it with one another."

**Important Reminder:**

**Don't forget to check out our latest diocesan resource, "Family Connections", available on our Diocesan Webpage ([www.rcchurch.com](http://www.rcchurch.com)). It is a wonderful way to deepen your understanding of the faith.**