

A reading from the book of Sirach.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

Anger and wrath, these are abominations,
yet a sinner holds on to them.
The vengeful person will face the Lord's punishment,
for he keeps a strict account of their sins.
Forgive your neighbour the wrong he has done,
and then your sins will be pardoned when you pray.
Does anyone harbour anger against another,
and expect healing from the Lord?
If one has no mercy toward another like oneself,
can one then seek pardon for one's own sins?
If one who is but flesh harbours wrath,
who will make an atoning sacrifice for that person's sins?
Remember the end of your life,
and set enmity aside;
remember corruption and death,
and be true to the commandments.
Remember the commandments,
and do not be angry with your neighbour;
remember the covenant of the Most High,
and overlook faults.

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PAUSE for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

SECOND READING – A 24

A reading from the letter of Saint Paul to the Romans.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

Brothers and sisters:

We do not live to ourselves,
and we do not die to ourselves.

If 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.

For to this end Christ died and lived again,
so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.



Pause for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING – A 24

The Lord be with you.

And with your spirit.

A reading from the holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord

Peter came and said to Jesus,
“Lord, how often should I forgive
my brother or sister if they sin against me?
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.’
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.”



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

SCRIPTURE IN DEPTH

Reading I: Sirach 27:30-28:7

Sirach is one of the deuterocanonical (or in Reformation parlance, “apocryphal”) books. Until recently it was known only in a Greek translation, although we knew from the prologue that it was originally written in Hebrew. Fragments of the Hebrew original have been discovered at Qumran. The author was Jesus ben Sirach, who wrote it about 180 BCE.

It was translated into Greek by his grandson about 130 BCE. It is, therefore, a late book, not too far removed from the New Testament period. The teaching of our excerpt reaches a height not far from the New Testament in what it says about forgiveness (see the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord’s Prayer, and today’s gospel about the unforgiving servant).

Responsorial Psalm: 103:1-2, 3-4, 9-10, 11-12

Slightly different selections of verses from this psalm are used on the third Sunday of Lent and on the seventh Sunday of the year in series C.

The reason for its choice today is that human forgiveness is meant to be patterned after divine forgiveness, as both the first reading and the gospel testify.

Reading II: Romans 14:7-9

The context of this passage is a discussion about the relation between the strong and the weak members of the Church. Recent work on Paul’s letter to the Romans suggests that this discussion was occasioned by tensions in Rome between Gentile Christians who were liberal in their attitude toward the law and Jewish Christians who were scrupulous about legal observances; they were the strong and the weak, respectively. Paul urges mutual toleration. The strong in particular should respect the scruples of the weak.

As so often, Paul moves from specific practical problems to the underlying theological principles. The fundamental principle here is that no Christian exists by himself or herself, but only in relation to the Lord (the risen and exalted Kyrios, that is, Christ), and therefore in relation to other Church members, who are equally related to the Kyrios.

This excerpt looks very much like a baptismal hymn. This is indicated by the “we” style common in hymns and by the way the hymn goes beyond the point immediately at issue, namely, the relation between weak and strong, to speak of the living and the dead. As Lord of the living, Christ is the Lord of both groups within the Church.

Gospel: Matthew 18:21-35

The parable of the unforgiving servant is found only in Matthew's Gospel. We do not have to deal, therefore, with a redaction of a known source like Mark or Q. Matthew's redactional contributions are: (1) attaching the parable to the saying about forgiving seventy times seven, with the connecting link "therefore"; (2) placing this whole complex at the conclusion of the community discourse, thus making the parable a moral exhortation for the community; (3) adding the final saying, which draws the moral.

Note the typically Matthean phrase "my heavenly Father" (Mt 18:35). Also note that the saying of verse 22 and the teaching of the parable do not really fit together. The parable does not inculcate repeated forgiveness but rebukes refusal to show mercy on the part of those who have received mercy from God.

There is no reason to doubt that this is an authentic Jesus parable. It fits in perfectly with the situation in his ministry. Jesus has offered God's eschatological forgiveness to his hearers already here and now. If they do not share in this forgiveness with other people, God will revoke that forgiveness at the last judgment. This parable was told by Jesus, not as a moral exhortation about life in the Church, but to shame the consciences of his hearers.

Reginald H. Fuller