

Forgiveness!! September 13, 2020

Sirach 27: 30-28:7; Psalm 103; Romans 14: 7-9; Matthew 18: 21-35

“Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive, as many as seven times?” This was a natural doubt of any apostle. St. Peter had the wisdom and courage to raise a question. Jesus replied, “I say to you, not seven times but as many as seventy-seven times.” Jesus was using this number 77 to teach them to forgive more is more than we could imagine. For the true follower of Christ, needs to forgive every other person without any limit.

I want to illustrate the importance of forgiveness with two real stories. On January 23, 1999, RSS activists set fire to Graham Steins and his seven and nine-year-old sons Philip and Timothy. This took place in Khandamal in the State of Orissa. The family of Steins was working among the lepers of the village. Gladys, his wife who witnessed the horrific murder of her husband and children, returned back to India in 2006. In an interview she said, “In forgiveness, there is no bitterness and when there is no bitterness, there is hope. I know who holds the future”. Many people in Orissa adopted the Christian faith after the martyrdom and Gladys’s heroic forgiveness.

Here’s a second story of An Indian nun Sister Rani Maria Vattalil, a member of the Franciscan Clarist Congregation, who was stabbed 54 times in front of more than 50 passengers in a passenger bus on January 25, 1995. The Crime took place near the village of Udainagar, in the central State of Madhya Pradesh. This state is over 90 percent Hindu and less than 1 percent Christian, and the Cristian community often suffers various forms of discrimination.

Sr. Rani Maria worked with the landless poor, urging them to insist for a living wage from their landlord, and taught them to give up bad habits, like

drinking. She organized village women into self-help groups, that could pool resources to provide financial assistance in emergencies, and helped families to establish saving accounts. The local money lenders and landlords hired an assassin, Samundar Sing, to kill her.

Sister Rani Maria is a model for proclaiming the Gospel in a pluralistic country. Her murderer Singh was sentenced to life imprisonment acquitting 11 others. The nun's younger sister, also a religious, Sr. Selmi Paul, visited Singh in prison in 2001 and tied a Rakhi to his hand and recognized him as brother and family member at "Raksha Bandhan", a Hindu festival. Both these incidents show the value of Forgiveness. It brings healing and the mercy of God. Holding on to anger will bring more suffering, particularly for the person who harbours hate.

The first servant in the Gospel parable for this Sunday owed a huge debt of 10,000 talents. One talent represented fifteen years of daily wages. Even if his whole family worked for their master, they might not have payed them back. This impossible debt was totally dismissed by the king in the parable. The second servant owed the first a large, but payable debt, 100 denarii. That was the equivalent of 100 days wages. Jesus continues to teach us, the first servant refused mercy to the second, and as a result, he lost the mercy that had been offered to him by the Master.

Sometimes people will say, "I can't forgive and forget. I can never forget what he or she did to me or to my family." Forgetting might not be possible. It also might not be the best thing to do. Forgetting is not part of the gospel requirement. But, forgiveness is! Jesus taught us to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." These are some of the most healing and difficult words in scripture. Today we pray for the grace to forgive and move on with life, just as Jesus has forgiven us and shared His love and His Life with us. May God bless you! +++ Amen. Fr. Thomas