

St Pius & St Anthony Homily 24th Sunday Ordinary Year A1

Speaking of **how many times**? How many times has this scene played out around family dinner tables in the evening? A Father or mother asks one of kids, “So Junior, what did you learn at school today?” We can all guess what comes back? “Nothing.” So, the parent says, “Okay then you have to go back tomorrow, and keep on going until you learn something.” In our gospel, Peter asks, “Jesus **how many times** do I have to forgive my brother?” And like the child at the dinner table, he gets an answer he is not expecting. Peter thought he was being generous, by offering to forgive up to seven times, But Jesus comes back, saying how about seventy times- seven? Jesus takes Peter’s seven & raises him seventy-seven. Of course, it is not an exact number that Jesus is after, *(that is one of those arguments not worth even entering into)* It doesn’t matter what the exact number is, Jesus is saying basically, “Peter, you start forgiving and just keep at it, & I will let you know when you can stop” (and that is never short of heaven!) *(It reminds me of washing the dishes as a kid, and asking “Mom how many of the dishes do I have to wash, and she says all of them, but I say “They are still bringing them in to me!” You just have to keep at it!)* So, if we ask how much forgiving must we do? Jesus says, “Don’t stop. Keep at it. I’ll let you know when. Maybe it doesn’t end, this side of heaven.

I know we all feel resistance rising up inside of us, when we hear Jesus today! We ask, “Forgive Forever?” How? Well, Jesus goes on to help us find motivation to forgive. We need motivation. Forgiveness is not easy! So, Jesus goes on to tell a great parable to give motivation and increase our willingness to forgive so much and so readily. Basically, it is this: Consider what God has done for us (wiping our sins away) and then how can I ever hold back from forgiving another person. Remembering that if God measures back to me as I give out to others – that motivates me. But Jesus would encourage us to consider **whatever** would motivate us to forgive the other person. Maybe something is wrong with them, maybe I don’t have all the details, maybe I need more compassion, maybe more is begin expected of me, maybe I should be stronger, whatever can help me re-frame the situation **to forgive more**, then I should do that!

Sometimes as we learn more about the situation, we can become more forgiving. This happened to me once: When I was a kid, we went to Lourdes Catholic School. We lived over by Legion Park *(by O’boro Country Club-KWC)* about 1.75 miles *(notice I stretch that full amount out)*. To get to and from school, we had

several methods, if the weather was nice we would ride bikes to school, or mom/dad would drop us off, or we'd carpool with neighbors. Maybe even sometimes we would walk! (Keep in mind it is almost two miles -but not all uphill?) It might happen sometimes that mom might call to school and ask secretary to send word to our classroom, that we needed to walk home that day. When that happened, my older brother and I would try to pass the time walking as comfortably and quickly as possible. We would come up with games to occupy us as we walked along, like trying to guess the next house number down the line based on the house we saw first (*and it wasn't always the next even or odd number based on how wide the lot was*). Or we would guess how many dogs were barking in the back yard of house we just passed. Or we would change our route and argue about which way was quicker, or if we were lucky enough to have coin change (rare) and we would detour and drop in at 'Stop and Go' and get piece of 3-cent Bazooka Gum with the comic to read each other as we walked. Or we'd alternate for a block at a time, carrying the other person's book load to change it up. Which brings up the deal that caused my 'forgiveness dilemma'. My brother one day suggested that if I carried his books, he would run all the way home and get on the bicycle and ride back to pick me up and we'd both ride the rest of way home. So, he loaded me up with 6-8 hardback books and off he runs. I watched him turn corner running out of view. And I walked a block, turned corner and looked (no brother on bike approaching), and kept walking to the next corner and looked, (no brother on bike approaching). The route was basically from school, simple right turn a couple blocks, then a left and long stretch, then another right short block, and another left quick if we wanted a down-hill walk, or straight ahead a piece, and then a final left for the home stretch four blocks. Long story, short, my point is that I end up turning on that last stretch and STILL, no brother on bike. Now mind you, I am still carrying all of the books! So, I'm getting angry! What would I do when I got home and found my brother sitting in front of fan eating snacks or playing video games? I wasn't thinking, "What if the tires were flat or chain broken on bike?" No, I was picturing him in the back yard swing or laying on the couch in front of TV. Forgiveness was not on my mind. And what happened? Well, God introduced a motivation to forgive, as soon as I got home. God does that (and mothers do too). What I found when I got home, was that my mom intervened with a medical emergency treatment on him. Apparently, when he got home from running all the

way, she must have met him and saw how beet-red his face was and sweating head to toe, and so she intervened and made him get into the bath tub of cool water, in front of fan to cool down safely. OKAY, then in that case, I get it and forgive! I sure don't want a brother to have a heat stroke on me! So that change of frame is what led me, motivated me, to be forgiving. But, I must confess I learned too, and was never up to making such a deal walking home again.

Yet in our gospel, Jesus pulls such a motivating 'reframing' or adjustment to our perspective, by telling his parable of a master who forgives completely a huge debt of a servant, and then that same servant turns around miserly, unforgivingly inflicting cruel collection procedures upon a fellow servant who owes only a small sum in comparison. When the master hears of such a lack of gratitude in the servant He just forgave, he changes course and brutally jails/tortures that unforgiving servant! Jesus suggests that we will face such an exacting judgement if we don't offer forgiveness generously to others. Of course, forgiveness is not easy, but that is why Jesus encourages such motivational 'reframings' to move us to forgive. Or at least for us to 'want to' forgive. When I admit I 'should' forgive that is at least a step closer to actually forgiving. We have to at last want to get to such a level of generous forgiving. In fact, Jesus actually commands such loving forgiveness. For example, at the Last Supper (John 13:15) He washes His apostles' feet and tells them "You also must do as I do" and what is feet washing but a service of charity to keep us loving and in relationship to others. He acted forgiveness out as an example for us to follow, when he kissed Judas (Matthew 26:49-50), forgave Peter's denial of him ahead of time (Luke 22:32), outright forgave us all saying "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34) even before we were done crucifying Him. But also, and most often don't we all claim to be as forgiving as He, with every Lord's Prayer-Our Father we pray "Forgive us our trespasses AS we forgive those who trespass against us". We said it! So, Jesus wants to motivate us to forgive using whatever reframing we need to get there. Try seeing your offender in a new light: maybe they are weak, maybe they are hurt, maybe they are sick, maybe they don't know, but most of all, we have to realize that they are a fellow child of God, and God calls us to look upon their sin against us, similar to how we should see our own sin against God. If He forgives us everything, then we should forgive the small offense of someone else.

May we be strong enough to forgive, or at least start praying for the grace to forgive as Jesus has forgiven us!