

Sunday, September 17, 2023

#Homily by Father Karl Daigle

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle A-2023

In our Gospel reading, Jesus calls us to forgive others 77 times. The use of the number 7, especially a double 7, is quite significant. In the Bible, the number 7 symbolizes perfection and completion. We are most like God; we are most perfect, and we are most complete whenever we forgive. Jesus's use of 77 times reveals that, like Him, we are called to forgive others an unlimited number of times.

When I was younger, I was far from being like Jesus. I was far from being perfect and complete because I had a forgiveness problem. Even though I was a nice guy, with the exception of my immediate family, if you offended or sinned against me, I either didn't want to have anything else to do with you, or the relationship was never quite the same.

Over time, I eventually began to change because of the powerful example of my mother. I noticed that when people offended or sinned against her, she was willing to always forgive them in her heart without being a pushover or a doormat. As a result, she had joy, peace, as well as healthy and enduring relationships. I lacked these things, and I wanted them so much for myself. Through the grace of God, I gradually became a forgiving person, and now, I am as happy as I have ever been. Looking back in hindsight, it was naïve and unrealistic for me to believe that I could go through life without being slighted, offended, or sinned against by other people.

I believe it is safe to assume that we want other people to be willing to forgive us and give us a second chance or a multitude of new beginnings. If we want that for ourselves, it seems only fair that we are willing to do the same and offer people the gift of our mercy. Most of all, since Jesus is ever willing to forgive us of our sins, time and time again. In a spirit of gratitude, we are called to pay it forward to other people.

In the Gospels, there are certain things that Jesus was quite direct and forceful about. One of those issues involved forgiveness. He basically revealed that He will not forgive us if we do not forgive others. He will forgive us only to the degree that we forgive others. Since we set the judgment standard for ourselves, let us love ourselves by being merciful so that we can be recipients of God's abundant mercy. In fact, depending on the severity and circumstances surrounding our lack of forgiveness, if we do not change, we can be separated from God both in our earthly life and for all eternity. Forgiveness is a huge issue and a big deal for God. Therefore, it should be for us.

I personally believe that we do forgiveness all wrong. We do it backwards. We approach forgiveness in a passive manner. We believe we have forgiven once the negative feelings have gone away if they go away. When we do this, it is like the tail wagging the dog. On the contrary, forgiveness is about making the ongoing, proactive choice to forgive regardless of our feelings. By continually making the choice to forgive, our feelings are gradually healed and transformed by our free will in cooperation with the grace of God.

Forgiveness is a process in terms of how we harness our emotions and continue to make the daily choice to forgive. Sometimes it can get confusing because we believe we have forgiven someone. Then something unexpectedly triggers us, and all these negative and dark feelings rise to the surface. This does not mean we have not forgiven the other person. It just means that we have not fully healed. When this occurs, we are called to renew our proactive choice to forgive in light of the new wave of emotions.

What does it mean to forgive another person? I believe there are several components. We are willing to pray for the other person. We respect them to the face and behind their back. In our hearts, we wish them good and success and not bad, failure, and misery. We resist cultivating or acting on feelings of hatred and revenge. Depending on the type of relationship, we renew our commitment to the relationship with an open mind and heart. In extreme circumstances, it may be necessary to distance ourselves, minimize our exposure to the person,

or even terminate the relationship. This is a viable response when the person is so toxic and unhealthy to us that it poses a real danger to our ongoing spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical health. We can do these things while still forgiving them in our hearts. As Jesus prayed from the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Within the last few months, I was strolling through my Facebook wall and came across a powerful reflection. The message was that nurturing a lack of forgiveness is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die. As we cling to our lack of mercy, we are actively poisoning and killing our hearts, minds, and souls. As the level of poison grows within us, our perspective on the other person, people in general, and reality itself can become increasingly clouded and distorted. For our own spiritual and personal health, it is important to reject the mental rolodex that keeps score of how other people have slighted or sinned against us. It is a dead-end street and a pure waste of precious life and spiritual energy.

Our God is so good that He would never expect us to do something that He Himself is not willing to do. If He calls us to forgive us an unlimited number of times, we can be assured He is willing to do the same for us. In one of his opening speeches, Pope Francis stated, "God never tires of forgiving us. May we never tire of asking for His mercy." The parable of the Lost Sheep is meant to reveal the personalized love that God has for every sinner. On the outside looking in, it seems crazy and ridiculous to leave the 99 just for 1 until we are that one. Each of us is uniquely and eternally important to God.

There is never a need for us to doubt that God will forgive us for the sins we commit during our lifetime, even the worst ones. When Jesus died on the cross, He personally took on Himself all of our sins. The cross is Jesus's pronouncement to us that we are already forgiven.

For our part, all we have to do as we journey through life is to acknowledge our sins, confess them, and continually strive with the help of God's grace to avoid them. This shows we love Him and are sincere, even though imperfect.

As God has shown us great mercy, may we be generous and joyful in paying it forward. I assure you that if we are willing to do so, we will have a high quality of life and relationships. Even more important than that, we will have a profound earthly and eternal union with God.

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