

Tuesday of the Third Week of Lent - March 14, 2023
Judicial Vicars Conference

“Unless each of you forgives your brother or sister, the Father will not forgive you.”

Matthew 18: 21-35

We all owe somebody something, whether it's a literal loan on a car or a house or something more ethereal, like the “debts” we owe to those who help us in so many ways -- the person who introduces us to someone who eventually gives us a job, the friend who drops off dinner when a family member is ill, the neighbor who assists us when we are or someone we love is in crisis. We need each other more than we probably care to realize or admit, so much so that we may feel that our salvation at times hinges upon how we act in relation to each other. That's quite a connection.

Today's gospel parable is somewhat stunning on the surface level. We may read it and think, “How dare that man demand payment of a loan when his own larger debt was forgiven? If we are honest, we can probably see where we do the same thing in less obvious ways. Every day we are given the chance to let something slide, to forgive, to accept, to encourage, whether it's in a traffic jam, or a classroom, or a board room, or our living / community room. But we humans tend toward self-preservation, which often manifests in grudges, backbiting, and fear-based responses that make us much more like the unforgiving servant than the magnanimous king.

Jesus puts it plainly today: You will not receive what you refuse to give. Or, in the language of our times. Pay it forward!

The Gospel today calls us to think about the debts you and I owe. What would it be like if someone said, “All is forgiven; you owe nothing”? Imagine that feeling. Now contemplate the biggest debt you are owed. Would you be able to turn around and forgive it without hesitation? Could you do it even if your own debts were not forgiven first? What might hold you back? Now look at your inner life, the places where you are weighed down by things you feel have not been forgiven by others. What would it feel like to be free of that for good and forever? Could you offer that to someone who is bound by a debt you have not yet forgiven? Take a chance. Offer forgiveness, and free yourself at the same time.

As we consider the important role forgiveness must play in our personal lives as followers of Jesus, we might consider the two-fold wise advice Pope Francis offers us for our 2023 Lenten Journey. In his 2023 Lenten Address the Pontiff encourages two paths:

“The first path has to do with the command that God the Father addresses to the disciples on Mount Tabor as they contemplate Jesus transfigured. The voice from the cloud says: ‘Listen to him’ (*Mt* 17:5). The first proposal, then, is very clear: we need to listen to Jesus. Lent is a time of grace to the extent that we listen to him as he speaks to us. And how does he speak to us? First, in the word of

God, which the Church offers us in the liturgy. May that word not fall on deaf ears; if we cannot always attend Mass, let us study its daily biblical readings, even with the help of the internet.” The Holy Father then goes on to speak of the second path of our journey: “ In addition to the Scriptures, the Lord speaks to us through our brothers and sisters, especially in the faces and the stories of those who are in need. Let me say something else, which is quite important for the synodal process: listening to Christ often takes place in listening to our brothers and sisters in the Church. Such mutual listening in some phases is the primary goal, but it remains always indispensable in the method and style of a synodal Church.” (From the text of the Holy Father Francis’s Message for Lent 2023, on the theme: “Lenten Penance and the Synodal Journey”: February 17, 2023)

Forgiveness and Listening! Wonderful opportunities to grow in grace this Lent!

May Our Mother of Guadalupe walk with us on our Lenten journey as we grow in knowledge and love of her Son.