

So what if that story was read on Wall Street? Or at a Chamber of Commerce meeting or at just about any business meeting? You might hear a resounding, "Don't invest in that landowner. He's crazy. He'll go bankrupt. That's no way to run a business!" Of course the story is not about business it is about people and generosity and about using what we have to lift people up and it is about the kingdom of heaven.

In Matthew's gospel this story is sandwiched between two other stories. First, the discussion Jesus has with Peter and the disciples about how hard it is for those who cling to wealth to enter heaven. Peter says, "*We've given up everything and followed you. What will be will there be for us?*" Jesus answers, "what you give up will be returned to you and a hundred times more - plus eternal life." Jesus then tells the story we just heard of the landowner and then, immediately following that, Matthew tells us that Jesus takes the disciples aside and tells them about his own suffering and death and resurrection to come. We have to give up in order to receive - and the Lord Jesus demonstrates that with his life. Giving us a glimpse of how the kingdom of God works.

In the first reading we hear the Lord say through Isaiah, "*my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways.*" How true. When I was in the seminary there was a community of French Canadian nuns whose ministry is to cook in seminaries and they had been doing it for decades in seminaries in Canada and the United States, including where I was. Well, the food they served was not very healthy and tended to be very bland and plain. So the seminary administration decided to send the sisters for an update to a dietary and culinary seminar to learn new ways. When they came back they were asked, "What did you learn?" They answered, "We learned that they don't cook the way we cook." And nothing changed. "Your ways are not my ways," says the

Lord. How well we know that, how well the gospel demonstrates that, but the point is not simply to acknowledge that the Lord's ways are different from ours but to strive to make our ways look more like God's ways, to imitate what we learn from Jesus as Christians ourselves.

To be sure, the landowner in the story could not always pay the one who does one hour of work the same he pays the one who does ten hours of work. But he responded to a need of the ones whom no one had hired. He showed compassion to them because that is how it is in the kingdom of heaven - always. It sometimes can feel like compassion is a fading practice in our world, not just in business but in government, in neighborhoods, sometimes even within families. Sometimes it's explained away, "if you're compassionate to people they'll take advantage of you." There is some truth to that, but mostly it is an excuse. And compassion is not fading away - just look at the response in the wake of the natural disasters we've seen, from Texas to Florida to Puerto Rico to Mexico City. People are reaching out to people, changing "their ways" to help lift up others, even strangers - their ways become God's ways. But it does not have to take a disaster to see that happen. This life and the next is given to us. It is not about getting ahead, it is about all getting there together. Thus, as St. Paul tells us, "*conduct yourselves in a way worthy of the gospel of Christ.*"

Homily for September 17, 2017, 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

We don't often think of it in this way, but forgiveness is one of the most freeing things we can do in our lives. We can get stuck in the pain and the hurt so deeply that we make stone our hearts: "After what so-and-so did to me, I will never forgive him." We carry that weight around from year to year and maybe even

decade to decade. And if we do that to one person we can start a routine of pride with every person who hurts us or offends us in some way or other. It's like Marley's chain of sin from *A Christmas Carol*, you can build it link by link each time you refuse to forgive.

Even if we don't harden our hearts, we can still too often weigh or examine forgiveness, thinking, "if I forgive her for what she did, it is like saying what she did was OK or even was right."

Forgiveness and being right or wrong really don't connect at all.

They are two different things. If I forgive, I let it go, I give it to God. It doesn't mean what happened was right. Like the king who decided to settle accounts, the debt was so huge, the Greek literally says 10,000 talents, such that it was impossible to pay back. In the story the king doesn't consider the amount or the fault, he forgives him the entire thing.

Even if we don't harden our hearts and we don't examine forgiveness we can get stuck on the question of trust. I can't forgive him because I can never trust him again. Like being right or wrong, forgiveness and trust are two different things. I can let go and refuse to harbor ill will against a person, even to forgive that person, but that doesn't mean I automatically trust that person again. Trust needs to be earned. Forgiveness doesn't. For-give - it is free, it is a way of living.

Yesterday, as a parish, we celebrated St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta shortly after the first anniversary of her canonization and upon the 20th year since her death. She is near and dear to the people of India who claim her as their own, often no matter their religion. She had this to say about forgiveness and a few other things. If you've heard it before, it is worth hearing again:

*People are often unreasonable and self-centered. Forgive them anyway.
If you are kind, people may accuse you of ulterior motives. Be kind anyway.
If you are honest, people may cheat you. Be honest anyway.
If you find happiness, people may be jealous. Be happy anyway.
The good you do today may be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway.
Give the world the best you have and it may never be enough. Give your best anyway.
For you see, in the end, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway.” — Mother Teresa*

And from her little book, No Greater Love: "The other day, a sister called to tell me that one of the young men was dying but, strange to say, he couldn't die. So she asked him, "What is wrong?" And he said, "Sister, I cannot die until I ask my father to forgive me," So the sister found out where the father was, and she called him. And something extraordinary happened, like a living page from the gospel: The father embraced his son and cried, "My son! My beloved son!" And the son begged the father, "Forgive me! Forgive me!" And the two of them clung to each other tenderly. Hours later, the young man died.

Forgiveness is one of the most freeing things we can do in our lives because it is about God's goodness and keeps us out of God's role of judgment. That's where Paul is going in his Letter to the Romans: "*No one lives for oneself and no one dies for oneself.*" Whatever we do, we are the Lord's. Just a few lines earlier in the letter he says, "Who are you to pass judgment on someone else's servant?" We are all servants of God and, like the king in Jesus' story, only God can pass judgment. So we are reminded, "Forgive as you are forgiven." Why would you expect more than you give?"