

## Closing Prayer

O God, most high,  
you are slow to anger and rich in compassion.  
Keep alive in us the memory of your mercy,  
that our angers may be calmed  
and our resentments dispelled.

May we discover the forgiveness  
promised to those who forgive  
and become a people rich in mercy.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
God for ever and ever.

*Opening prayers, Ordinary Time 24, Year A<sup>2</sup>*

CPL • LBC Year A Proper 19.odt • 2020-07-06

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<sup>2</sup> *Opening prayers : scripture-related collects for the years A, B and C from the sacramentary* / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999.

## Proper 19

*(Sunday between 11 and 17 September inclusive)*

### Principal Service readings

Genesis 50.15-21	Joseph's brothers ask for forgiveness
Psalms 103.[1-7]8-13 (or 103.8-13)	The Lord is rich in faithful love
Romans 14.1-12	Be charitable to others and not judgemental
Matthew 18.21-35	Forgiveness; the parable of the unforgiving debtor

### Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,  
speak to our hearts in the stillness,  
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,  
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;  
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

### Gospel Reading

#### *Parable of the unforgiving debtor*

<sup>21</sup>Peter came and said to Jesus, 'Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?' <sup>22</sup>Jesus said to him, 'Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.'

<sup>23</sup>For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. <sup>24</sup>When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; <sup>25</sup>and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. <sup>26</sup>So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' <sup>27</sup>And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. <sup>28</sup>But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow-slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' <sup>29</sup>Then his fellow-slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' <sup>30</sup>But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. <sup>31</sup>When his fellow-slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. <sup>32</sup>Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. <sup>33</sup>Should you not have had mercy on your fellow-slave, as I had mercy on

you?"<sup>34</sup> And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt.<sup>35</sup> So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.'

Matthew 18:21-35 NRSV<sup>1</sup>

## Comments and Questions

Although Matthew 13 is known as the chapter of parables, there is another one here, unique to Matthew, and both simple and profound. Someone owes the king an inordinate amount of money – ten thousands talents is something like a hundred million pounds – so great that it cannot possibly be paid off. And so, if all his assets were sold off he would still end up in prison. The king, hearing the pleas for mercy, relents and releases the man from his debts and from prison. This same man finds someone who is in debt to him (a denarius was worth about a day's wage for a labourer). The debtor appeals to the man who has just been forgiven, using language that sounds familiar. However, rather than be moved with pity the man who now finds himself in a position of power now casts the poor debtor into prison.

The king's servants report all this to the king, who is furious at the lack of forgiveness shown. 'Were you not bound, then, to have pity on your fellow servant as I had pity on you?' the king asks. The servant is then handed over to the torturers until he should pay his debt – effectively for all eternity. Let us remind ourselves that it is a parable, and its details need not be taken literally, but it does have a certain shock value.

It is a clear lesson on the need for forgiveness, as we encounter it in the Lord's prayer: 'forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors' (Matthew 6.12). Jesus warns people that if they withhold forgiveness then forgiveness will be withheld from them. Grudges are corrosive things, gnawing away at those harbouring them. We may hear 'forgive but don't forget' as a way of reminding ourselves of past transgressions we have suffered. The gospel calls us to a higher standard. We need to be able to forgive freely, which is more than just forgiving those deemed worthy of it.

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<sup>1</sup> New Revised Standard Version Bible is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

## Quotations

1

To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.

C. S. Lewis, 1898–1963

2

Forgiveness is not an occasional act, it is a constant attitude.

Martin Luther King Jr., 1929-1968

3

Forgiveness is the name of love practised among people who love poorly. The hard truth is that all people love poorly. We need to forgive and be forgiven every day, every hour increasingly. That is the great work of love among the fellowship of the weak that is the human family.

Henri J. M. Nouwen, 1932–1996

## Related topics

*For further study:*

Forgiveness; sacrament of reconciliation; God's mercy; sin (personal, social, systemic); grace of baptism; repentance and reconciliation; mystery of the church; reign of God; judgement; foundations of morality