

The Debt

I remember this Gospel reading very clearly. I remember it clearly because this was the Gospel that was being read when I began my internship at St. Peters. Since I was being introduced to St. Peters, I had to do all six masses during that weekend and so I heard this Gospel six times in one weekend. As I was listening to this Gospel, I remember telling myself, I am currently at peace with all my relationships and I don't feel the need to forgive anyone. The next day I went to go play basketball and as I was jumping to go block the shooter, instead of getting out of the way he went in front of me and ducked which caused me to flip over him and land on my head and back. It was a hard fall. For a whole month I had a hard time getting out of bed, in and out of my car and as I was laying in pain in bed, it was as if the Lord was speaking to me saying, "Did I remember you saying that you had no one to forgive?" Forgiveness is easy to talk about but hard to do.

That is the reality which our Lord reveals to us today in the Gospel. When the servant is forgiven his debt of 10 000 talents, I was intrigued about what the conversion rate to our time was. A day's wage was equivalent to one denarii and 6000 denarii are equivalent to one talent which is the largest monetary unit in ancient times. So to pay off a debt of one talent would take about 6000 days or about 17 years. But this servant did not owe one talent, he owed 10 000 talents which is equivalent to 170 000 years or, based on the average income in Calgary of \$60 000, \$10.2 billion dollars. The point that Jesus is making is that the servant was forgiven a debt which he could not have paid off in 1000 lifetimes. Now the contrast becomes very clear when this servant goes to his friend who owed him a much smaller amount or literally 600 denarii, 600 days wages which is about \$120 000 in modern times. A significant amount? Yes. But compared to the debt that servant owed, \$120 000 was nothing.

But if Jesus is applying this to us, what is the debt that we could not pay? Firstly, it is the debt of our very existence, we who did not need to exist came into being out of nothing. Not only that, we were also given the gift of living in communion with the Almighty God. But most importantly, we all were responsible for the death of the only begotten Son of God:

CCC 598 *In her Magisterial teaching of the faith and in the witness of her saints, the Church has never forgotten that "sinners were the authors and*

*the ministers of all the sufferings that the divine Redeemer endured."³⁸⁹
Taking into account the fact that our sins affect Christ himself,³⁹⁰ the Church does not hesitate to impute to Christians the gravest responsibility for the torments inflicted upon Jesus.*

We have a debt which we could not pay which was the very life of our precious Savior, but in the face of so great a debt, what did God do? "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do!" The day on which the Second Person of the Holy Trinity experienced death in his humanity, the day on which the most heinous crime was committed, we were forgiven and now we call it Good Friday. But what does our Lord ask us to do?

In 1902 in Corinaldo Italy, Maria an 11 year old girl was in her home one day when Alessandro a 19 year old man who was filled with lust in his heart approached her for his own sexual desires. Maria refused his advances even though he threatened to kill her, and when she persisted in remaining pure for the Lord he stabbed her 14 times. Maria was rushed to the hospital, but her wounds were too great but so was her love and the last words she uttered before she died was **"I forgive Alessandro and I want him with me in heaven forever."** Alessandro was sentenced to a 30 year jail sentence but while he was in jail he had a dream about Maria who handed him 14 white lilies, one lily for each time he stabbed her. In this dream he experienced her forgiveness and had a radical conversion. After he finished his prison sentence, he went to the house of Maria where her mom lived to ask for forgiveness and when Maria's mom saw him at the door she said, **"If Maria forgives you and if God forgives you, how can I not also forgive you?"** She immediately took him to midnight mass for Christmas where they received communion beside each other, where Alessandro publicly asked for forgiveness from the community and where Maria's mother adopted him as her own son. Today we now know Maria as St. Maria Gorretti.

Forgiveness is easy to talk about, but hard to do. But with God all things are possible and by his grace may we graciously forgive like Maria and her mother forgave knowing that we have been forgiven an incalculable debt.