

Homily For Tuesday of the First Week of Lent - Year I

St Peter's 8:30am Mass- Tuesday, March 26, 2019

Daniel 3: 25, 34-43 "Do not put us to shame, but deal with us in your abundant mercy."

Psalms 25: 4-9 "Your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love have been from of old."

Matthew 18: 21-35 "Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave as I had mercy on you?"

Forgive How Many Times!?

Introduction

On average, we watch a lot of police and lawyer shows. So, we know what a plea bargain is. That's when someone who knows he will be found guilty, instead of fighting it in court, decides to make a deal for less than what would be the full punishment, in exchange for pleading guilty.

Daniel

It looks like that is what Azariah is doing. He is pulling out all the stops in his argument. He pleads for mercy based on the covenant God made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He reminds God to act for his own name's sake, perhaps suggesting God will look bad if he doesn't act to save his people.

But there are huge differences. The situation can't get any worse. Already in the middle of the fiery furnace, the worst punishment is already being administered. Secondly, Azariah freely admits that he is there because of the sins of the whole people.

We have been brought low because of our sins. We have lost everything: prophets, leader. We can't even properly plea for mercy because we have no place to make an offering. All we have, he says, is a contrite heart and a humble spirit that, despite what we have done, may we be accepted. Instead of trusting in a system, all he has is trust in God, for no shame will come to those who trust in you.

Psalm

Remember your mercy. make me know your way. Teach me in your paths.

Matthew

Sin, mercy, forgiveness. These are related in a way we never ever see in our culture. Yet faith tells us they matter more than anything.

Peter's the one who asks the question about how much we have to forgive. Literally just before this passage, Peter was given authority to forgive sins. This is Jesus' own authority, that which reigns in heaven. Easy for God. Really hard for us, so Peter needs clarification.

Forgiving someone for the same offense against us three times would have seemed like enough at that time, as it would be for us. After three times, I think I am not alone in saying that's all the chances you get.

Seven is a perfect number, the number of creation, suggesting an endless number of times, so Peter's use of it would suggest he feels that this would be way more than the minimum, a perfectly reasonable and generous number.

It looks like you need to know arithmetic to understand Jesus' answer. Whether it is 77 times, or 70×7 , the parable is clear that forgiveness and mercy are really limitless. The servant owes many talents, something like 20 years wages for a worker. It's half a million times larger than what the second servant owed, which might as well be an infinity. As with Azariah, the servant's situation is dire. He's in big trouble already.

One wonders why the master would lend such an amount and what did he do with it but that doesn't seem to be the point, which is that he, and we, are in an impossible payback situation. It doesn't matter if a thug was sent to break our kneecaps with a baseball bat. We are not going to be able to pay back. As with Azariah, it doesn't matter how he got in that situation. It's about the mercy of the master. The king responds with inconceivable mercy. He is moved with compassion, forgiving him the entire debt.

Forgiveness and Mercy

Jesus is preparing us to feel the weight of our own situation as sinners and more deeply appreciate God's infinite mercy, not only to receive it but to offer it, in turn, to others.

Jesus calls his disciples to a very high standard of mercy. We cannot speak words of forgiveness while harbouring resentment. Admittedly this is not always easy. Some injuries are so deep that it is not in our power not to feel or to forget an offense (CCC 2843).

My Grandmother used to say: I can forgive, but I can never forget. But Jesus says, unless you forgive your brother from your heart, it's not enough. It has to be internal, not just external. There really is no partial forgiveness, even though many of us may be in that in between state. But, if we partially forgive, then we will be only partially free. That's the nature of mercy. Mercy is the greatest manifestation of God as Love. His mercy and his love are the same thing. They both manifest who he is.

Call To Action

You know the words of the Our Father: Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Jesus comments on the Our Father, saying: If you forgive, your heavenly Father will forgive you but if you don't, he won't. God is kind of sticky on this point. But do you see how the Our Father is worded? It is actually saying that by limiting our forgiveness of others, we are the ones limiting the forgiveness we can receive.

If we can remember how much God has forgiven us then we can avoid becoming like that unforgiving servant who, though he was forgiven much, failed to forgive others. We can also pray for the person who hurt us and try to see beyond their harmful acts and to consider their own sorrowful condition.

I suggest that there is really only one challenge for us coming from these passages. We cannot move forward with respect to forgiveness, and the freedom it offers us, until we realize at a deep level how much God has loved us. And God's

love for us has nothing to do with how wonderful we are. It has to do with what God has already done for us in Jesus Christ. That's why we have this journey with Jesus for these forty days in the desert.