

Liturgy of the Word with Children
Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A
17 September, 2023
Matthew 18:21-35

Catechist Background

Today's gospel reading comes from a larger discourse on how the community should live together. Immediately prior to this passage, Jesus has discussed the exclusion of those who persistently and belligerently offend against the community, focussing on correction and reconciliation to make reunification with the community possible. Because of the passage immediately preceding it and the illustration Jesus gives in the parable, it could be implied that the 'brother' Peter has in mind has already admitted fault and is asking for forgiveness. When Peter answers his own question concerning the frequency of forgiveness, he and his comrades probably think seven is a generous amount; quite a number of rabbis at the time thought three was sufficient. Jesus demonstrates through the parable that the question itself is flawed. The master, representing God, is owed a huge debt that it would have been impossible for an ancient servant to have actually accumulated (10,000 talents was 10 times the salary of Herod the Great; one denarii was the daily wage for a labourer, and one talent was worth 6,000 denarii). The servant in question would be unable to repay his master even if he sold himself and his family. Our extreme indebtedness to God dwarfs any hurt others could inflict upon us. We owe God our very lives, and we have a duty to extend forgiveness to all those who truly ask us for it.

We Say Sorry

Leader: Lord Jesus, you came to bring us closer to one another and to the Father, Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: You forgive us when we ask for your forgiveness, Lord have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Leader: You show us how to be merciful, Lord have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Gloria

We Pray (1)

Lord God, help us to know how to forgive others so that we may live in your peace.
Amen.

Gospel Acclamation

Gospel: Matthew 18:21-35

Reflecting on the Reading with Children

- What kind of things do you think someone may have done to Peter to have wronged him?

- Did Jesus mean the number to be taken literally? Would you be able to go about your life and remember 'I have forgiven Jennifer seventy-one times, Kieran thirty-eight times, Catriona fourteen times, and...?' If children seem stuck on this point, show that we often use big numbers not in their literal sense (e.g. 'I've told you thousands of times' or 'We've been working on this puzzle for hundreds of years!')
- Does anyone know how much a denarius or a talent of money is worth? It may be helpful to say that the second servant would have had to work 100 days to earn the 100 denarii to pay back; the first servant would have had to work over 164,000 years to pay back his debt of 10,000 talents.
- Is it fair to expect others to forgive us if we are not forgiving? Is it reasonable to expect God to forgive us if we are not forgiving towards other people?

Response

Encourage the children to continue to reflect on the parable in the reading through the use of tableaux. Ask for volunteers to take the roles of the first servant and the master (all other children—and any adults—should take on the roles of onlookers). Arrange them in a 'frozen' position with the servant begging the master for his/her life. Read verses 23-27. Interview the people playing the roles and ask what their characters are thinking, what they are hoping for, why they are doing what they are doing. Change the scene, this time with characters for the first and second servant. Read verses 28-29 before interviewing, then read verse 30 and ask for reactions to the prison sentence.

For the third scene, ask for people to inform the master of the first servant's actions, read verse 31 and interview.

For the final scene, ask for the first servant and the master, read verse 32-34 and interview again.

If possible, get the children to close their eyes and think of one person they have a difficult time to be forgiving towards. Encourage them to make a special effort in the coming week to be forgiving to that person.

We Believe

Relating to the Creed what you have shared with the children, ask this series of questions and invite the children to reply, 'I do.'

- Do you believe in God the Father who created us out of love?
- Do you believe in Jesus Christ who brings us back to God's love?
- Do you believe in the Holy Spirit who lives in us when we show God's forgiveness to others?

We Pray (2)

Again, try to relate the bidding prayers to the reading by saying, 'You show mercy to all who ask for it and so we now pray...'

Leader: We pray for the Church around the world, that we may always be a good example of loving forgiveness to others. Lord in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

Leader: We pray for all people in the world who want revenge on others, that their hearts are softened. Lord in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

Leader: We pray for people who have been injured or who have died because of the violence of others. We pray also for those who love them. Lord in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

Leader: We pray for anyone we know who has hurt us in the past. Lord in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

Leader: Lord, forgiveness is not an easy challenge to live out. Help us to put forgiveness into practice in our lives. We make all our prayers through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

