

In Mt 18:21-35, the servant, probably a provincial governor, is brought before the king. He owes the monarch a huge amount of money, namely 10,000 talents. A talent amounted to 6,000 denarii, i.e. 6,000 days' wages. In other words, the servant owed the king the equivalent of 60 million days' wages, i.e. 160,000 years' work at one denarius a day. It was an enormous sum which would be absolutely impossible to repay. Knowing this, the king ordered that he be sold, along with his wife, his children and all his property, in payment of the debt.

This punishment was futile from a financial point of view because the top price for a slave was less than a talent. We are told that at this point the servant said, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back in full.' This pathetic appeal was meaningless because he would have needed to work for thousands of years to pay back the debt. We are told that, 'Moved with compassion, the master of that servant let him go and forgave him the loan.'

It need hardly be said that in this parable the king represents the Lord, who, in his mercy, cancels the servant's enormous debt, i.e. his sins, as a matter of pure mercy of an unmerited kind.

THE COMMUNION RITE

At the Saviour's command ...
Our Father, who art in heaven, ...
Deliver us, Lord, we pray, from every evil, ...
For the kingdom,
the power and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Lord Jesus Christ, ... **Amen.**
The peace of the Lord be with you always.
And with your spirit.
Lamb of God, you take away the sins ...
Behold the Lamb of God, ...
Lord, I am not worthy
that you should enter under my roof,

At this point, the parable moves on to a related point. The man whose debt has been forgiven meets a fellow servant who owes him the relatively small sum of 100 denarii, i.e. the equivalent of 100 days' work. Does the servant forgive him? No, he grabbed him by the throat and demanded that he pay back what he owed.

When the other servants heard about what had happened, they were outraged by the injustice involved and went and told the king about it. The king summoned the man he had forgiven and sentenced the servant to be thrown into debtor's prison until he would pay his debt, which, of course, was impossible.

but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.

Communion Antiphon (Cf. Ps 35:8)

How precious is your mercy, O God!
The children of men seek shelter in the
shadow
of your wings.

Prayer after Communion

May the working of this heavenly gift, O Lord,
we pray,
take possession of our minds and bodies,
so that its effects, and not our own desires,
may always prevail in us.
Through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

FORGIVE AND YOU WILL BE FORGIVEN

The parable ends with a significant punch line, 'So will my heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives your brother from your heart.' As Shakespeare said about human forgiveness in *The Merchant of Venice*:

*The quality of mercy is not
strained;
It droppeth as the gentle rain from
heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice
blest;
It blesseth him that gives and him
that takes.*

— Pat Collins



Reflection

In which ways do you offer unlimited forgiveness to others as God has offered it to you?



Lesson

The divine power of God's forgiveness is active in the Church.



Prayer

Heavenly Father, through the power of your Holy Spirit, enable us to forgive each other from the heart.