

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Aug 11th 2016

Memorial of Saint Clare, Virgin

Today's gospel reminds me of the words we say often in prayer: Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. We rely on the mercy of God to forgive us as we often stumble in the world. We don't live up to gospel of loving our neighbor and expect to be forgiven. But here's the tricky part: Sometimes we find it hard to forgive, just like the servant who had his own debts forgiven but went after someone else.

We hold grudges and slights in our hearts. We think: I'll show him. He won't get away with this. We find it difficult to let go of those debts we feel are owed to us. It's not easy sometimes. It requires opening up our hearts when it seems better to keep our hearts closed and protected. Opening our hearts to forgiveness, to forgive those who trespass against us, opens our hearts to God.

In the gospel, Jesus is asked how often we must forgive those who sin against us. The questioner suggests seven times. Jesus' answer is "not seven but seventy-seven times." That forgiveness over and over is something we need to practice, as athletes practice for a game or dancers rehearse for a performance. We should be able to feel our hearts grow more open as we forgive those who trespass against us, not once, but again and again and again.

The first reading underscores the difficulty of being open to God. Sometimes we are asked to shoulder the burden and set out in the darkness and trust in God. It is difficult to be an exile, but we have to be willing to face that darkness.

Finally, today is the memorial of Saint Clare, the founder of the Poor Clares. She was a follower of Saint Francis of Assisi and lived joyfully in poverty and prayer.

My prayer today is to say the "Our Father" and think about the words and how I live them in my own life. I pray for generosity of spirit and openness to God. I pray for the openness to the joy of simplicity as practiced by Saint Clare.

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