

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Mar 21st 2017

After my first read of today's gospel in Mathew, my initial response to Peter's question was with regards to my own life situations. In other words, I asked myself, "How often do I forgive others?" I suspect this was a natural response. But, after further reflection, my thoughts turned from forgiveness of others to forgiveness of self. Could the spirit of Peter's question be thought about in a different way? Could his question be modified to say, "Lord, if I sin, how often must I forgive myself?" Part of the human experience includes times when we frustrate our better selves. In these moments, do we recognize our humanity and not only ask others and God for forgiveness, but ask it of ourselves, too?

A related scenario to consider is this. Last semester in one of the courses that I was teaching at Creighton, I was grading papers from students who were asked to write a reflection on their own well-being. A common theme arose as I made my way through the papers, and that was one of personal forgiveness. From the outside, these students appeared to have life by the tail. They were smart, socio-economically well positioned, and receiving a quality education. However, many were struggling with well-being. Most of their struggles appeared to be related to their feelings of inadequately performing in all aspects of life based on unrealistic social perceptions. Fortunately, the theme of that particular course was personal well-being and these students had plenty of time throughout the semester to explore their feelings related to this. But, within a society that promotes individualism and rewards itself based on perceived status, a bigger issue becomes more clear. Do we have perceived expectations of ourselves that are difficult, if not impossible, to achieve? And, if we fall short of these expectations, are we able to forgive ourselves? Perhaps Peter's question could be modified even further to ask, "Lord, if I perceive myself as something less than what I expect myself to be, how often must I forgive myself?" The answer from the Lord is likely the same, "seventy-seven times" (or more).

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