

COLLECT, READINGS AND REFLECTION
SUNDAY 17 SEPTEMBER 2023 - TRINITY 15

COLLECT

God, who in generous mercy sent the Holy Spirit
upon your Church in the burning fire of your love:
grant that your people may be fervent in the fellowship of the gospel
that, always abiding in you,
they may be found steadfast in faith and active in service;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Psalms 103.1-13

- 1 Bless the Lord, O my soul, ♦
and all that is within me bless his holy name.
- 2 Bless the Lord, O my soul, ♦
and forget not all his benefits;
- 3 Who forgives all your sins ♦
and heals all your infirmities;
- 4 Who redeems your life from the Pit ♦
and crowns you with faithful love and compassion;
- 5 Who satisfies you with good things, ♦
so that your youth is renewed like an eagle's.
- 6 The Lord executes righteousness ♦
and judgement for all who are oppressed.
- 7 He made his ways known to Moses ♦
and his works to the children of Israel.
- 8 The Lord is full of compassion and mercy, ♦
slow to anger and of great kindness.
- 9 He will not always accuse us, ♦
neither will he keep his anger for ever.
- 10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins, ♦
nor rewarded us according to our wickedness.
- 11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, ♦
so great is his mercy upon those who fear him.
- 12 As far as the east is from the west, ♦
so far has he set our sins from us.
- 13 As a father has compassion on his children, ♦
so is the Lord merciful towards those who fear him.

A reading from the letter of Paul to the Romans, chapter 14, verses 1-12

Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarrelling over opinions. Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgement on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. Who are you to pass judgement on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. Those who observe the day, observe it in honour of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honour of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honour of the Lord and give thanks to God.

We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

Why do you pass judgement on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgement seat of God. For it is written,
'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me,
and every tongue shall give praise to God.'
So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Gospel Acclamation

Alleluia! Alleluia!

Blessed are you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth for revealing the mysteries of the kingdom to mere children.

Alleluia!

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to Matthew, chapter 18: 21-35.

Glory to you, O Lord

Then Peter came and said to Jesus, 'Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.'

'For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything." And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow-slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, "Pay what you owe." Then his fellow-slave fell down and pleaded with him, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you." But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow-slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, "You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow-slave, as I had mercy on you?" And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he should pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.'

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

A Reflection from Peter ...

When Peter says to Jesus, "How many times should I forgive someone?" you can't help feeling a bit sorry for him. The old teaching was simple: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth... and here comes Jesus talking about forgiveness. Now forgiveness is all very well. It's a great way of re-setting relationships and enabling a new start; it can help deal with guilt; and, remarkably, it always make me feel better. But what about the person who has sinned against me? What does forgiveness do to them and for them? This is much less clear. We can't see into their soul. We don't know whether they feel the same release that we feel when we forgive someone. There is then some risk. My act of forgiveness may not get them to the place that I should want them to be. Yet Jesus says to Peter, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times!" – in other words, just keep forgiving, don't stop.

This is the heart of the matter. And it is all about us. We cannot make other people think, speak or do what we want. But we can change ourselves. Yet we resist. We think, 'I'll give this forgiveness business a try and see if it works.' And we are warm and generous in forgiving – but we also keep a close watch to see if it's had an effect... We may try once or twice more, but seeing little change, we say to ourselves, 'Well, I tried, but that didn't work, so I'm giving up.' Then we are just where Peter was at the start. Jesus tells us that forgiveness is about helping us grow into freedom and generosity. Never mind the other person, or the government or whoever it may be – leave them to God! And so it is that Jesus tells us there is no limit to forgiveness. God goes on forgiving us and giving us a new beginning. We must learn to do the same, because it is in the act of forgiving that we are set free.