

Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost

Forgiveness of Injuries

“So also my heavenly Father will do to you, if you do not each forgive your brothers from your hearts” (Matt., 18:35)

The meaning of the parable in today’s Gospel is easy to understand. In fact, Our Lord Himself explained it, pointing out that, just as the master refused to condone the debt of his servant because he would not forgive a debt to his fellow-servant, so God will refuse His pardon to human beings who will not forgive the offences they receive from their fellow men.

That we must forgive those who offend us is one of the most definite teachings of Jesus Christ. He commanded: “Love your enemies, do good to those who persecute and calumniate you” (*Matt.*, 5:44). In His own prayer He bids us to say: “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

Theologians teach that even to those who wrong us we are obliged to show ordinary or common signs of friendship. Thus, we must greet them when we meet, and speak kindly to them. On the other hand, we are not obliged to show them extraordinary or special signs of friendship, such as conferring gifts on them or writing them affectionate letters.

It is not easy to forgive those who have treated us harshly, but with the aid of God’s grace we can do so. It is quite natural that the remembrance of what we have suffered should cause a feeling of resentment, but this is not necessarily an indication that we have not forgiven these persons. The best proof that we have forgiven them “from our hearts” (to use Our Lord’s expression) is the [act that we pray for them.

It is a well known fact that a person who allows hatred for another to abide in his soul not only offends God but also renders himself unhappy. He is soured and miserable. On the other hand, one who does not allow himself to be disturbed by the unkindness and injustice he receives from others is usually a very happy and contented person.

The most deplorable form of enmity occurs when the parties are intimate relatives, particularly if they dwell in the same house. It is indeed a sad violation of Christian charity when brothers and sisters keep up a feud for years, under the same roof. Often such a situation begins with a trifling incident, but with the passing of the years this is magnified into extravagant proportions. Such persons should remember the parable of the unforgiving servant.

Practical Application

If you receive unkindness or injustice from others, ask for the grace to forgive them in the spirit manifested by Our Lord when He prayed on the Cross: “**Father, forgive them.**”