

Trinity 14

My dear Friends,

In our lives there is something that we all want to receive but we are often reluctant to give away. I am not talking about money or some other precious material object but rather something that is central to our Gospel message. In this week's reading from St Matthew, we again hear from St Peter who asks Jesus "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive, as many as seven times?". (Matthew Ch 18 v21). We should understand that Peter would have been schooled in a religious tradition that was very much based on rules and regulations which the Rabbis and other rulers of the Synagogues would have spent a great deal of energy enforcing. One Jewish teaching said that a man could be forgiven three times but not four. Peter appears generous in allowing seven in this context. He has learned from Jesus in earlier encounters not to require vengeance, "Be reconciled to your brother or sister," and "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew Ch 5). Nevertheless Peter wants an answer to his dilemma of how often he should forgive. Jesus' reply is amazing "Not seven times but, I tell you, seventy-seven times." One translation of the scriptures says seventy times seven which would equal 490! The point however is clear, forgiveness should not be limited.

As is so often the case Jesus emphasises the message with the parable of a servant who begs forgiveness of his master, receives it yet fails to offer that same forgiveness to others who are indebted to him. This takes us back to my first sentence, can we think of instances when we have done wrong and are desperate to be forgiven by a loved one or friend? When they show mercy it is an enormous relief. There are probably occasions though when we have harboured a grudge against someone who has hurt us. It is not good because this eats us up inside and makes us less than what we can be. Certainly it is not what Jesus wants of us. If ever we need a reminder of this then the words of the prayer we offer at every service and no doubt say daily ourselves should help "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." We ask for God's mercy but know that as we seek to be more like him we too should show that forgiveness in our actions and in our lives.

Best wishes and prayers

Stewart

The Reverend Canon Stewart Lisk,  
Vicar of Roath and Area Dean of Cardiff.