

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

There was once a story told of a man who was in a great deal of debt to another man. The second man called the first to pay up, to settle his accounts. Sadly, the first man was unable to pay off his debts, so the second man wanted to sue the first, sell all he had, and collect his debt that way—he sought to ruin the first man. This man pleaded for mercy, “Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.” Moved with compassion, the second man released the first and forgave all of his debts.

Now, wouldn't you know it, the first man had men who were indebted to him. This guy viciously seeks payment from these others, demanding that they pay him back. Just as the first man had done, these others pleaded for mercy; for patience in paying him back. Unlike the second man, however, this first man was not moved with compassion, and took up his case with the legal system. Of course, the second man got wind of what the first had done, and called him back to make amends. Because he would not have patience with all the others, the second man reversed his decision and demanded that the first man repay the debt. He went through a torturous claims court trial until he had paid back every last penny to the second man.

You may recognize that as the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant. (cf. Matthew 18:23-34) Jesus closes the parable by saying, “So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.” (Matthew 18:35) You should hear that in the context of what Jesus says in today's text: “Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.”

It's not necessarily that the Father will withhold forgiveness from you if you don't forgive your brother who sins against you, but Jesus does teach us that He will remove His forgiveness from you if you do not likewise forgive those who sin against you. You are already forgiven. The Father has had mercy on you in the person of the Son, who assumed flesh like yours and was given the name Jesus that He would take your sins into His flesh and fulfill what His name means—YHWH saves—and give you the forgiveness, life, and salvation that you by your sins do not deserve, but which He won for you by His suffering, death, and resurrection.

You, dear hearers, are the first man in that story, indebted to the Father on account of your sins. But, your Father in heaven is merciful, and is moved with pity. He would not have you die apart from Him because of your sins, so moved with compassion for you, sent His Son to die in your place on the cross. Your Father is merciful to you. Now, you are expected to be merciful to others as the Father was merciful to you.

Today's text is an expanded catechetical lesson on the Fifth Petition of the Lord's Prayer; “And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors,” as St. Matthew gives it to us. (Matthew 6:12) We pray in this petition that God would continue to be merciful to us, even as we are, by His grace, merciful to others. “Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.” In today's text, Jesus instructs His disciples and you what life as one Baptized into His death and resurrection—one who lives under His grace and mercy—looks like.

And so Jesus gives 16 imperatives followed by 3 goals of His catechesis. In the pericope appointed for today, we only get five of those imperatives and one goal.

- Be merciful. Do not judge. Do not condemn. Forgive. Give.
- All of this with a goal to have sight in place of blindness.

The imperatives are all predicated on the fact that your Father in heaven does all of them with and to you. You are in Christ, therefore you are one to whom God is merciful. The judgment against you for the sake of Jesus Christ is not guilty; the law accuses you, but the judgment has been

pronounced long ago in your stead: "This is my son whom I love." Furthermore, Jesus the Son of God bore in His flesh every last bit of condemnation that you deserved, dying in your place; therefore, you are not condemned, as St. Paul wrote, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus..." (Romans 8:1a) No, you are not condemned, but forgiven for the sake of Jesus Christ. And because you are in Christ, you are given all that you need from those glorious riches which Jesus earned. (cf. Philippians 4:19) "Go and do likewise," (cf. Luke 10:37b) Jesus is telling you.

But do you? Of course not.

- You are that first man in the story told earlier, receiving mercy, but showing little to none. On those whom it is easy to show mercy, you probably have no problem showing mercy, but on those from whom you want to extract a little something, there is no mercy. In your estimation, they need to pay, learn a lesson, get what they deserve, etc.
- And judging? Well, didn't you just make an unmerciful judgment call, esteeming that someone needs to learn a lesson or get what they deserve? It is all too easy to judge others without substantive evidence to make a just judgment or with a faulty understanding of God's standards. Often, it sounds like this: "God is merciful to me, but He could never show mercy to someone like you."
- And in those faulty judgments, you are quick to condemn the other sinner, just as the first man in the story was quick to condemn the others in debt to him. So you proclaim that the homosexual is going to hell, while you ignore the thief, drunkard, or divorcée in your midst.
- You hold grudges. You find it difficult to forgive the sin of a brother against you, especially if it was the nth time he sinned in this fashion.
- And boy are you stingy. You find an extra dollar in your wallet, but it is impossible for you to give it to the man on the corner looking for a hamburger to fill his belly.

Can the blind lead the blind? Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the plank that is in your eye? That plank is what gives you cause not to be merciful, to judge, to condemn, not to forgive, and not to give. Yes, your Father is merciful to you in the person of His Son; only He is able to remove the plank from your eye as well as the speck from your brother's eye. You, as His disciple, are not above your teacher. And this is why He is teaching you, because you do have that plank in your eye, and because He is the one who removes it. Jesus is the one who is righteous with you; you, as His disciple, are not above Him, and so you should be righteous to those to whom He has also been righteous.

Because of your plank, despite not heeding Jesus' imperatives, He is still all of these things to you: merciful, not judging, not condemning, forgiving, and giving. Your Father is the second person in the story told earlier. However, you are not called upon by your Father to settle accounts, because your account has already be settled. Look at the cross, for there it is as if your Father said, "Take your bill and write zero." (cf. Luke 16:6-7) There, full payment for your debt of sin is paid as the full wrath of God against it, yours and the world's, was leveled against Jesus in your place.

This is as true for the one on whom you are not merciful, the one whom you judge, the one whom you condemn—the thief, drunkard, divorcée, and homosexual—the one against whom you hold a grudge, and the one to whom you do not give as it is for you; the wrath for their sin was leveled against Jesus fully, just as it was for your sin, dear Baptized. This may be a hard thing for you to hear, but God in Christ is all of these thing to all creation, whether they believe and trust in Him or not. Jesus is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, the Apostle John wrote. (cf. 1 John 2:2) The difference is that those who do not believe reject God's grace—they do not want a god who is merciful toward them, who does not judge or condemn, who forgives them or gives to them, as strange as that may sound; because they do not believe, they are condemned already (cf. John 3:18)—this is the Word of the Lord, not the word of a mere man.

In the catechesis in today's text, Jesus removes the plank from your eye that you may see the mercy and grace of the Father toward you and others—that you may see your lost condition and that

you are found in Christ Jesus—that you may receive from the bountiful hand of your Father all that He desires and loves to give to you. Because of Jesus—because of His work given to and received by you in faith—the Father no longer sees fault in you—you are not condemned (cf. John 3:18)—but He sees one to whom He has mercy, whom He does not judge, whom He does not condemn, whom He has and continues to forgive, to whom He is always, joyfully giving.

*“Wir sind alle Bettler,”* Luther said before He died. “We are all beggars.” A beggar is one who is simply givable to. They have nothing to bring to the equation. He is one who stands there and can only be given to—mercy, no judgment, no condemnation, forgiveness. That’s you before your Father in heaven, and He is overjoyed to be the one who is gracious and merciful to you for the sake of His Son, for whose sake you are forgiven for all of your sins.

“Go and do likewise.” You leave here, and for a while, encouraged and empowered by this catechesis, you do go and do likewise. But you struggle with your Old Adam, so you once again fall into the habit of withholding mercy, of exercising judgment and condemnation, of not forgiving and not giving. As a Christian, you misrepresent your Father who does all of these things to you. Still, He represents Himself rightly through you as you come back to this place, where Jesus is for you, because He calls you back here to remind you that you live under His grace, giving you confession for these and all your sins, giving to you once again by His grace the forgiveness for all of your sins.

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