

Forgive and forget.

Let bygones be bygones.

You'll never be able to get on with your life, unless you can forgive him.

Forgiveness is good for the soul.

Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.

How often must I forgive? Seven times?

No, I say to you, not 7 times, but 77 times.

Sometimes I wonder if Jesus was serious!

Someone takes your child from your home.

Assaults her and kills her....shows know remorse.

Are we supposed to forgive that?

A spouse has an affair...says it, "just sort of happened."

Are we supposed to offer forgiveness there?

This past Monday the 16-year anniversary of the attack on our country.

Are we supposed to forgive that?

When do we say enough is enough?

When do we say, this is unacceptable behavior, and it won't be tolerated?

When, if ever, do we say, "I'm sorry, I can't forgive you?"

Seventy-seven times.... sometimes I just wonder if Jesus was serious.

Sometimes I just don't know,

but this much I do know: Jesus talked a lot about forgiveness.

We heard about it last week; we hear about it today.

And as Christians, we need to try to figure it out.

Our gospel today illustrates that point,

as Peter tries to figure out forgiveness.

You see, Peter had heard Jesus talk about forgiveness before.

And so he wanted to gain a few brownie points

and he asks his now famous question.

“Lord,” he said, “How often must I forgive?”  
and then he gives a **generous** answer to his own question: “Seven times?”

I say it’s a generous answer  
because Rabbinic Law said that you had to forgive three times.  
Three chances was all you got.  
Three strikes and you were out!

Peter must have felt pretty good.  
He must have been proud when he suggested  
he would be willing to forgive 7 times.  
Peter thought he understood Jesus.... but he didn’t.

It seems to me that today  
Jesus is teaching us a couple of things about forgiveness today.

Number one: He tells Peter 77 times.  
Jesus is talking about infinite forgiveness here.  
And what he’s really saying is this:  
“You’ll never understand forgiveness until you stop counting  
Until you quit keeping score.”

And many of us are good at keeping score.  
I sent a gift and never got a thank you note.  
I’ve invited them to my house three times  
and they’ve never had me over there.  
I watch their kids all the time and they never watch mine.

Jesus says quit keeping score!  
Jesus invites us to give even if we don’t get the thank you note.  
Jesus tells us to invite someone over, even if they don’t do it in return.  
Jesus asks us to throw away the scorecard,  
and stop keeping track of who owes us what.

So that’s the first thing Jesus tells us:  
You’ll never really understand forgiveness until you stop keeping score.

The second thing Jesus tells us,  
and this may come as a comfort to some of us.  
We can never forgive.... I cannot forgive...you cannot forgive.  
WE can never forgive like God can!

There are times in our lives when the ability to forgive  
comes only by the grace of God.  
And times, perhaps, when it never comes at all.

Infinite forgiveness.

70 times 7 times forgiveness.

Complete and without reservation forgiveness.

Belongs to God and probably to God alone.

Okay, Father, I have to forgive but

Do I have to forgive if someone isn't sorry?

Great question and the answer comes from Jesus himself  
and it came as he hung upon the cross:

Father, forgive them; they know not what they do.

That's total forgiveness

And total forgiveness should be our hope... it should be our goal.

But, I don't think that means we let people walk over....

I don't think that means we don't punish bad behavior....

I don't think that means sometimes we don't say, "enough!"

If someone continues to hurt us over and over again,  
sometimes we need to walk away.

But when we do so, we must try to say as Jesus did,

Father, forgive them; they know not what they do.

Don't get me wrong....it's tough....it's radical forgiveness.

And at times we will fail.

At times it will seem too hard.

And then it is that we pray for God's grace.

Then it is that we pray for God's help,

knowing that we can't do it alone.

And God who reads our hearts will understand.

I'm sure many of you are familiar with the work of Sr. Helen Prejean.

She wrote the novel, Dead Man Walking,

a story about her work with inmates on Louisiana's death row.

In her work she became acquainted not only with the inmates,

but sometimes also with the families of the victims.

And she writes this about a father's forgiveness

of the man who murdered his son:

*Lloyd LeBlanc has told me that he would have been content with imprisonment for Patrick Sonnier. He went to the execution, he says, not for revenge but hoping for an apology....Before sitting in the electric chair Patrick Sonnier has said, "Mr. LeBlanc, I want to ask your forgiveness for what me and Eddie done," and Lloyd LeBlanc had nodded his head, signaling a forgiveness he had already given. He says that when he saw his dead boy in the cane field he prayed the Our Father....and he said, "Whoever did this, I forgive them." But he also acknowledges that it is a struggle to overcome the feelings of bitterness and revenge that well up, especially on David's birthday.*

Real forgiveness is hard.

It's difficult and it's never going to be easy.

Sometimes, all we can do is pray for God's grace,

And hope that that's enough.