**Solidarity with Sisters’ Sunday Communal Prayer for**

**Sunday, September 13, 2020**

But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion;

he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. **Luke 15:11–32 (NIV)**

**TECHNICAL CHECK-IN (Betty Thompson)**

I’m Betty Thompson and I welcome you here on behalf of Solidarity with Sisters.

* We sent the file of readings, responses, and lyrics.
* Camera: turn on if you want. Gallery view option. Arrow if multiple screens.
* Mute/Unmute: know how? Needed even during singing.
* **I will now mute everybody.** Unmute to speak.

Now let’s put technical things aside.

**QUICK THOUGHTS ON SHARING TIME (Suzie De Quattro)**

I’m Suzie De Quattro. Before we start, we want to talk a little about the sharing time. Our sharing is a different way of being together, it's not our usual way of conversation. It is a time to share our personal reflections more than to discuss ideas or help each other with specific options . And as well, now we’ve grown – to more than 50 people! We're so pleased to hear new voices and want to give everyone who wants to speak a chance (and still keep to a reasonable time frame.) This week let's share our own reflections. And leave silences for others to gather their thoughts, limiting the number of times we individually speak.

**WELCOME (Betty Thompson)**

* Welcome, everyone!
* Introductions – people who haven’t been here before?
* Thanks to Richard McGinnis for preparing today’s communal prayer.
* Thanks to Stu Sklamm and Reggie Ott for leading us in music, and to Alice McGinnis for her help, too.
* Thanks to the people who will be reading today – (Full Names). If you’d like to read on future Sundays, please get in touch.

**SETTLING IN (Suzie De Quattro)**

We are here to let God transform us.  So let’s open ourselves to God.  Feel the comfort of your chair and relax into it… and relax into God’s love for you.  Notice your body and any tension you are carrying with you.  Notice your thoughts and try to put aside those that distract you.  Notice your breath.  Feel your chest and stomach rise and fall as you breathe… and know the Spirit is moving in you gently and easily.  Now let’s take 3 deep breaths.  One to be here… one to be together….and one to be open to God’s action.

Now Stu Sklamm will lead us into our celebration.

**OPENING – “Gather Us In” (Stu Sklamm)**

Here in this place the new light is streaming;

Now is the darkness vanished away;

See in this space our fears and our dreamings

Brought here to you in the light of the day.

Gather us in, the lost and forsaken;

Gather us in, the blind and the lame;

Call to us now, and we shall awaken;

We shall arise at the sound of our name.

**GREETING (Richard McGinnis)**

Sisters and brothers, rejoice!The Spirit of Christ is among us! Alleluia!

**All:** And all God’s people reply: Amen! Alleluia!

**CALL TO WORSHIP (Richard McGinnis)**

We come together today because it is with each other that we experience ourselves as the people of God and the body of Christ. We gather to celebrate the great fact that God is in love with us. We are confident that in this next hour God will act in us and through us. We believe that God will give us light for our next step. And now let us pray.



**INSERT IMAGE BEFORE INVOCATION (Start SLIDE 1 - Betty T.)**

Forgive-Forgive Each Other

Image by [Diana de Weert](https://pixabay.com/users/diwero-50994/?utm_source=link-attribution&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=image&utm_content=208824) from [Pixabay](https://pixabay.com/?utm_source=link-attribution&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=image&utm_content=208824)

**RICHARD M**: Linda Donaldson will offer the Invocation.

**INVOCATION (Linda Donaldson)**

I forgive you--my brother, my sister,

From my whole, wounded heart;

For we are beloved children of the same God,

And I also am in need of forgiveness.

By this act I am healed,

And the love in my heart unloosed

From the strictures of my anger,

By the infinite mercy of God.

**(Move to SLIDE 2 - Betty T.)**

Seventy Times Seven

*Seventy Times Seven* © Jan Richardson. janrichardson.com

**INTRODUCTION TO THEME (Richard McGinnis)**

The readings from Scripture that we will hear today address the effect of granting forgiveness or of failing to do so. These Scriptures teach that we withhold forgiveness at our peril as the refusal to extend forgiveness to another separates us from God. The good news is that forgiving our neighbor opens the door to the compassionate forgiveness of our own sins by a merciful God and serves as a witness to mankind of the transformative nature of God’s love.

In the third and final reading, which is from Catholic Women Preach, we hear a personal story of the freedom achieved and the transformation that resulted from the decision to let go of anger and replace it with forgiveness. This serious story has been edited to eliminate most of the graphic details while retaining its impact. Even so, you may judge it inappropriate for young or sensitive ears. If that is a concern, please act accordingly.

In these readings, God is calling us to more than just the foregoing of revenge and the relinquishing of hate. The call is to imitate the forgiveness of God by letting go of any hurt, humiliation, woundedness or injustice, however large or small, that causes us to refuse to be instruments of God’s love toward our neighbor. Jesus calls for forgiveness “not seven times, but seventy-seven.” **(Stop SLIDE 2 – Betty)**

After each reading, Jim De Quattro will offer questions for our reflection.

**RICHARD M:** Now Richard Ley will read from the Book of Sirach, Chapter 27, Verse 30 through Chapter 28, Verse 7.

**READING 1:** **[SIR 27:30—28:7](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/sirach/27?30) (Richard Ley)**

Wrath and anger are hateful things,
yet the sinner hugs them tight.
Forgive your neighbor’s injustice;
then when you pray, your own sins will be forgiven.
Could anyone nourish anger against another
and expect healing from the LORD?
Could anyone refuse mercy to another like himself,
can he seek pardon for his own sins?
If one who is but flesh cherishes wrath,
who will forgive his sins?

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS (Jim De Quattro) (Start SLIDE 3– Betty)**

Are there people whom you find difficult to forgive? What is it that makes you hold onto your negative feelings?

What are some of the bitter fruits of holding tight to such feelings?

**SILENCE (Sound a chime after two minutes .) (Betty T.) (Move to SLIDE 4 - Betty)**

The King Cancelling his Servant’s Debt, from the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant, bound in Thesaurus Sacrarum Historiarum Veteris et Novi Testamenti, from the Netherlands, 1585

Credit: Metropolitan Museum of Art

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**RICHARD M.:**Now Sylvia Lynch will read from the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 18, Verses 21-35.

**READING 2:** [**MT 18:21-35**](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/matthew/18?21)  **(Sylvia Lynch)**

Peter approached Jesus and asked him,
“Lord, if my brother” or sister “sins against me,
how often must I forgive?
As many as seven times?”

Jesus answered, “I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times.
That is why the kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king
who decided to settle accounts with his servants.
When he began the accounting,
a debtor was brought before him who owed him a huge amount.
Since he had no way of paying it back,
his master ordered him to be sold,
along with his wife, his children, and all his property,
in payment of the debt.

At that, the servant fell down, did him homage, and said,
‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back in full.’
Moved with compassion the master of that servant
let him go and forgave him the loan.

When that servant had left, he found one of his fellow servants
who owed him a much smaller amount.
He seized him and started to choke him, demanding,
‘Pay back what you owe.’
Falling to his knees, his fellow servant begged him,
‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.’
But he refused.
Instead, he had the fellow servant put in prison
until he paid back the debt.

Now when his fellow servants saw what had happened,
they were deeply disturbed, and went to their master
and reported the whole affair.
His master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant!
I forgave you your entire debt because you begged me to.
Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant,
as I had pity on you?’

Then in anger his master handed him over to the torturers
until he should pay back the whole debt.
So will my heavenly Father do to you,
unless each of you forgives your brother” or sister “from your heart.”

**Move to SLIDE 5 (Betty T.)**

Radway 29; 17C Netherlandish stained glass telling the story of the Unjust Steward - In this panel the steward is choking a debtor. St Peter church Radway, Warwickshire 01/17/2010 (Flickr)

Credit: Walwyn.

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**REFLECTION QUESTION (Jim De Quattro)**

Each of us has been in situations where we found it hard to be forgiving. What did you have to surrender within yourself in order to overcome the barrier and extend forgiveness?

**SILENCE (Sound a chime and stop slide after two minutes.) (Betty T.)**

**RICHARD M:** Now Anne Regan will read a reflection by Cecilia Oebanda from Catholic Women Preach. **Cecilia’s homily describes the brutality and horror of her life as a freedom fighter and captive. This is an edited account. The link to the unabridged version can be found in Resources.**

**READING 3: A homily by Cecilia Oebanda at Catholic Women Preach, for the Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, September 17, 2017 (Anne Regan)**

I am Cecilia, and today I would like to reflect with you about my attempts to forgive and extend mercy given my experience in the mountains as a freedom fighter and as a political detainee during martial law in the Philippines.

I was born poor. At seven, I walked the streets selling fish every day. I also scavenged for food just to survive.

I started in the revolutionary movement as a teen-age catechist. I spent days among poor communities, telling of God’s mercy in the Exodus as He said to Moses: “I saw the affliction of my people and have heard their cries; set my people Free!”

And freedom has a price. The Marcos dictatorship soon turned its eyes to the Catholic Church because of its work for justice. Before I knew it, many were targets of the brutal military. Priests, nuns, and lay leaders were hunted down, including my young friends and me.

Many were killed and imprisoned. And so I was forced to hide in the mountains as a rebel leader and a young mother.…

After five years of fighting as a guerrilla, my husband and I were captured in a gun battle that lasted eight hours. I was then pregnant….

We were taken away by helicopter. I had a clear view of the fallen bodies of many comrades. I wanted to jump--out of desperation and guilt. Why was I alive?!

Military officials took us to an interrogation room in their camp. After two days in prison I gave birth to a son….We rotted in jail for four years….

In this Gospel reading according to Matthew, Jesus tells us of the need to forgive our enemies. In my heart, mercy and forgiveness did not come easily. It took time to forgive. I still feel anger against our captors and interrogators in prison, and in general the politicians who benefited during martial law at the expense of human rights violations.

I question myself. How does being merciful even to those who arrogantly provoked us lead to reconciliation? After being freed by the peaceful People’s Power revolution, I still felt as if I were in prison. I was never truly free, until one day I decided to let be and let God, and break away from the anger and pain that shackled my heart.

It felt like genuine freedom. Mercy is the seed of courage to forgive my perpetrators and captors. I cannot just judge them by their wrongdoing – in the same way, I must not define my life in terms of suffering.

Looking back to my days in prison, it was only in Christ where I found the strength to live. Throughout my life, as I fought for one form of freedom to another, Christ was at the center.

…[T]oday I have committed myself to freeing children who are exploited in brothels, cybersex dens, and forced labor situations…. In their journeys, I have witnessed the transformational power of forgiveness.

…It is only when we are moved by kindness and compassion that we let go of others who abused our trust and expectations.

May God who has the power and sovereignty over our lives, continue to bless us. Indeed, the Lord is kind and merciful, slow to anger, and rich in compassion. Amen!

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS (Jim DeQuattro) (Show SLIDE 6 – Betty)**

When have you healed a relationship by extending mercy to someone who has been unjust toward you; or, if not the relationship, the turmoil within yourself?

What do you do to prepare your heart to forgive--completely and without condition?

**SILENCE (Sound a chime and stop slide after two minutes.) (Betty T.)**

**RICHARD M:** Now Lynn Bufka will lead us in sharing.

**SHARING (Lynn Bufka)**

We invite you to share what emerged in **your** heart this morning as you listened and as you reflected on these readings. When we speak of our own **personal** feelings, we glimpse the many ways God is among us. We welcome new voices, and we also know that the wisdom of this community includes both words shared and silent listening.

If you would like to speak, please unmute yourself, and mute yourself again afterwards. If two people speak at once, we can take turns.

Who would like to begin our sharing?

(Sharing)

Is there anyone else who would like to share? I will give a few more seconds for last thoughts.

Thank you.

**LYNN:** Now Peggy Thompson will lead us in prayer.

**PRAYERS OF THE COMMUNITY (Peggy Thompson)**

Lord we thank you for the breadth and depth of your love and for living and loving in us and through us. May all that we do flow from our deep connection with you and all beings. Help us become a community that vulnerably shares each other’s burdens. Listen to our hearts’ longings for the healing of our world.

Now, as we offer our prayers, our response will be: Merciful Lord, hear our prayer:

God of unsurpassed healing, help us to remember that peace is possible when hearts are open to love. Let us pray. All: Merciful Lord, hear our prayer.

God of forgiveness, help us to share in the work of redemption by being merciful to those who have been hurtful and unloving. Let us pray. All: Merciful Lord, hear our prayer.

God of the distressed, the poor, the sick, and the oppressed, abide with Catholic sisters and the Leadership Conference of Women Religious in their work and in their communities. And accept our gratitude for the model of caring discipleship that they provide to us. Let us pray. All: Merciful Lord, hear our prayer.

Now. Let us remember the feelings and prayers, that arose in us as we shared reflections, and also the prayers that we carry with us. [Pause.]

For what else shall we pray? Please unmute yourself as you speak. Please end your petition with “For this we pray.”

(People speak.)

Thank you. We place all of our prayers, Lord, those spoken and those unspoken, into your loving care, and we entrust the outcome to you. Amen.

**RICHARD M: Bill Ellerman will lead us in the Offertory.**

**OFFERTORY (Bill Ellerman)**

Often, through our shared reflections, we discern a call to take some kind of action. The late John Lewis often quoted a West African proverb that says, “When you pray, move your feet.” How are we to move our feet this week? In response to the grace and goodness of God, how are we to share our abundance with a broken world? Let us take time to name within ourselves something we will offer to others in recognition of all that we have received from God. [Pause.]

In thanksgiving for the presence and power of Jesus Christ, and in unity with the Holy Spirit, let us pray. God of abundance, we commit to sharing our time, talents, and treasures so we that we may be a light and a witness to the transforming love of Jesus Christ. Amen.

**CELEBRATION OF COMMUNION (Richard McGinnis)**

O Great Love, we are humbled and emboldened

to know that you trust us to be your body in this world.

We are part of that body as we let go of all that separates us from you,

and as we embrace one another and your entire creation with merciful love.

We give you thanks for your presence in us. [Pause.]

We remember the night before Jesus died.

At dinner with friends, Jesus knew all that would soon be asked of them,

and, loving them to the end, Jesus showed them how to care for each other

as they went out into the world.

First Jesus washed their feet.

Then he looked at what was in front of them, the bread and the cup,

gifts of the earth and work of human hands, and blessed them.

So let us, too, invite God right now into what is front and center in our lives

knowing that God will indeed enter what we offer – and bless it. [Pause.]

Let us invite God into ourselves so that we become God’s living presence. [Pause.]

Holy One, you transform us as you nourish us here.

May we nourish others with your love. Amen.

**OUR FATHER (Richard McGinnis)**

Let us pray in harmony with all Christians throughout the world in the words that Jesus gave us:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread

and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us,

and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil

for the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

**SHOW SLIDE 7 BEFORE FINAL BLESSING (Betty Thompson)**



**RICHARD M:** Linda Donaldson will offer the Final blessing.

**FINAL BLESSING (Linda Donaldson)**

Broken, we have gathered. Nourished, we reach out.

Now let us now go forth in peace,

Ever mindful that we are accompanied by the Spirit,

in communion with each other

and offering communion to a hungry world. Amen.

**RICHARD M:** Reggie Ott will lead us in singing “Forgive Our Sins As We Forgive”

**CLOSING HYMN “Forgive Our Sins As We Forgive” (Reggie Ott)**

 1 Forgive our sins as we forgive,

You taught us, Lord, to pray,

But you alone can grant us grace

To live the words we say.

 2 How can your pardon reach and bless

The unforgiving heart

That broods on wrongs and will not let

Old bitterness depart?

 3 In blazing light your cross reveals

The truth we dimly knew:

What trivial debts are owed to us,

How great our debt to you.

 4 Lord, cleans the depths within our souls

And bid resentment cease;

Then, bound to all in bonds of love,

Our lives will spread your peace.

**SOURCES FOR SCRIPTURE, REFLECTION, QUESTIONS, ART, COMMUNITY PRAYER AND MUSIC**

**Scripture**

1. USCCB

https://www.usccb.org/

2. Bible Gateway

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2019%3A16-22&version=NIV>

**Homily Reflection**

Cecilia Oebanda, Homily for the Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, September 17, 2017

<https://www.catholicwomenpreach.org/preaching/09172017>

**Reflection Questions**

A Lectionary Resource for Catholics, Liturgical Cycle, Cycle A

<http://www.word-sunday.com/Files/a/24-a/A-24-a.html>

**Art**

1. Wikipedia Commons

Commons.wikimedia.org

2. Google Advanced Image Search

<https://www.google.com/advanced_image_search>

3. Jan Richardson Images, Illuminating the Landscape of Faith

<https://janrichardsonimages.com/>

4. Pixabay

<https://pixabay.com/photos/forgive-forgive-each-other-208824/>

**Community Prayers**

Joan DeMerchant, Resources for 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, 2017

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/spirituality/scripture-life/twenty-third-sunday-ordinary-time-0>

**Music**

Genius

<https://genius.com/Rosamond-e-herklots-forgive-our-sins-as-we-forgive-lyrics>