

24th Sunday – Year A

The parable of Jesus that we hear today is a good example of the fact that he did not mean everything he said to be taken literally.

The way he tells the story, Jesus could not have exaggerated any more if he tried. But because today's Gospel passage has modernized the language, and particularly the amount the first debtor owed, saying simply that it was a "huge amount," we can miss the hyperbole.

What Jesus' first audience heard him say was that the debtor owed the king 10,000 talents. This equates to what 10,000 soldiers were expected to be able to carry in their backpack during a day's march. So, let's just say it was 75 pounds of gold or silver. Multiplied by 10,000—now do you get the idea?

It's ludicrous to think that giving the debtor a little more time to repay the debt was going to make that much difference. It's simply beyond his capability to repay.

When we think of the challenge of forgiving others, that's the context that Jesus calls us to keep in mind.

The unimaginable amount that we owe to God for our very existence. It's meant to give us some perspective—especially when the call to forgiveness involves those petty little annoyances

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we all feel when living in close proximity with others: she drank all the coffee without making more – again! He left his clutter on the kitchen counter – again! They let their dog do his business on our lawn – again!

It's difficult to cultivate such an attitude of forgiveness that we can let go of those things instead of letting our sense of righteousness and indignation get the better of us.

I believe it's even more difficult to get to the point of believing that we owe God anything near what the story would indicate.

A more prominent attitude is that we want God to be just, and recognize that we really haven't done anything that wrong. We might be willing admit that we need a little mercy from him, but mostly we think we just need for him to see clearly how much we have on the scales in our favor.

There have been occasions in my life where I have been privileged to see more deeply into the reality of God's mercy and forgiveness. The most powerful of those have had to do with realizing what God has in store for me if I just quit resisting.

In a fundamental sense, God's mercy has to do with growing us to our full potential and vessels of his grace, and not letting our indifference or interest in other pursuits scuttle the process.

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The most important period in my life where this dynamic played itself out happened to me in college when I finally gave in and opened up to God's plan for me.

In terms of sin, my predominant sense was that I had wasted a lot of time. The more impressive aspect, though, was now that I had given in, how little difference that made to God.

I experienced in so many different encounters with people what God could do with me if I only let him. I was amazed by the conversations I had and by the situations that I was invited into, even by responses I made seemed to come from some better place than I was used to occupying.

It wasn't even me doing it so much as me witnessing it being done by that higher power who had decided that my habitual recalcitrance was not going to be allowed to get in the way of what he was doing in the world.

That's pretty humbling. It's what keeps me—most of the time, anyway—from being a jerk and demanding of others something that I myself have shown such a lack of.

The irony of Jesus' parable is so starkly drawn that we would have to be utterly dense not to see it. The only question that remains is, "Now that we've seen it, what will we do with it?"