



Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time
† Sunday 17th September 2017

In England and Wales Cycle of Prayer: For the spread of the Gospel, the spiritual harvest, Home Mission Day
Keynote: Our responsibility to forgive one another in Christ

Book of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) 27:30–28:7

Scholars are certain the named author, Ben Sirach, wrote the whole book. He didn't write for profit, but rather *'for all who seek instruction.'* His writing draws upon the style of the Wisdom literature of his time, and offers us wise advice for our day too. *'Resentment and anger, these are foul things,'* Sirach says, *'and both are found in the sinner.'* The recommendations that he makes are positive: *'forgive your neighbour the hurt he does you... remember the commandments, and do not bear your neighbour ill-will; remember the covenant of the Most High, and overlook the offence.'* In many parts of our world, we hear of the angry, violent tit-for-tat of vengeance, and closer to home we may have the 'neighbours from hell', but the advice is still to forgive those who do you hurt, and to stop hating.

Responsorial Psalm 102 [103] – A song of praise for God's love

Letter of Paul to the Romans 14:7-9

As we continue with our reading from Paul's letter, we learn something else about what it means to be part of the household of God. For a member of the household, belongs to the house, and is expected to serve the Lord and master of the house, in a real sense none of us lives for himself, *'the life and death of each of us has its influence on others'* says Paul, *'if we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord, so that alive or dead we belong to the Lord.'* As Christians we must acknowledge our relationship with the risen Lord (*kyrios*) — as members of the household of God we belong to Christ and to one another.

Gospel according to Matthew 18:21-35

The evangelist may in this passage be offering us a comment upon the teaching of Jesus about mercy and forgiveness. No one ever said forgiving was easy, not even Ben Sirach in the first reading today suggests that! So Peter asks Jesus, *'Lord, how often must I forgive my brother if he wrongs me? As often as seven times?'* So we have the parable from Jesus' lips about the king who comes to settle the accounts with his servants. Anyone who has owed money will be familiar with the urgent cry, which rings out through the years: *'Give me time and I will pay the whole sum!'* But the unjust servant treats his debtor, just as we might treat another. The wicked servant gives his debtor no time and deals most harshly with him. But this is not the way of God, for Jesus urges his listeners to *'forgive your brother seventy–seven times.'* The kingdom of God is remarkable for the characteristics of mercy and compassion. But in the kingdom of God injustice is not acceptable, and we would do well to remember the words in the Lord's Prayer: *'forgive us as we forgive those who trespass against us.'* How often do we forgive? A very great number of times says Jesus, maybe seventy–seven times if necessary!