

Lesson 6

Proper 19

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 18:21–35

Jesus gave the Keys of the Kingdom to Peter, then extended this authority to speak for Him to all His disciples. He focused on the loving concern that reaches out also with admonition in Jesus' name to a brother or sister who is deadening his or her relationship with Jesus through evident willful sin or persistent neglect of Word and Sacrament. Peter then came to Jesus with a question that revealed that he had understood that the point of the power of the Keys is to give forgiveness in Jesus' name to those who repent. The purpose is to include, not to exclude; to reconcile, not to reject.

85. What does Peter's "How often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?" say about this matter of forgiving those who have offended or hurt us?

86. What was Jesus suggesting with His "seventy times seven"?

87. Is it realistic to think of continuing to forgive someone whose "repentances" are short-lived and who just continues to offend and hurt you?

88. Why is it important to you that you learn to forgive those who offend and hurt you? (See Matthew 6:12, 14–15.)

Franzmann says in *Follow Me*: "There is a Must of forgiveness in the disciple's life. . . . Forgiveness is the ground the disciple walks on, and the air he breathes. . . . The disciple who will not live toward his fellow disciple by the forgiving word which he has heard from his God has forfeited the forgiving word of God. If he violates the fellowship with the brother whom God has placed beside him, he forfeits his fellowship with God" (p. 154).

89. What does your forgiveness do to and for the one you forgive?

Only Matthew provides us with this powerful parable of the unmerciful servant. We readily understand its point. Also there is an extreme contrast between the two amounts owed. The hundred denarii owed by the fellow servant was not an insignificant sum. It represented a hundred days' wages. But it becomes insignificant when compared with ten thousand talents.

90. Why did the king's gracious forgiveness of the unmerciful servant's debt not have the desired effect on the servant?

91. How necessary is it for us to learn the lesson of forgiveness taught by Jesus' parable? (See Mark 11:25.)

92. How can we get power to grow in our readiness to "forgive your brother from your heart"?

The Old Testament Lesson: Genesis 50:15–21

As a young boy, the favorite of his father, Jacob, Joseph told his family some dreams he had, dreams that obviously pointed to a time when his brothers and even his parents would bow down before him. In their jealousy and anger, his brothers sold him into slavery and told their father a wild animal had killed him. Joseph trusted the Lord, and the Lord's blessing followed him to Egypt. In whatever circumstance he found himself, Joseph put forth his best effort, and under God's guidance and blessing, he continually rose to the top. As a slave he was placed in charge of all of Potiphar's household. When falsely accused by his master's wife and imprisoned, he became the chief trustee in the management of the prison. When God enabled him to interpret Pharaoh's dreams, he was made Pharaoh's right-hand man and administered the storage of grain during the predicted years of abundance and its distribution during the predicted years of famine. In time, Joseph brought his family to Egypt, and they were settled on choice delta land in Goshen.

When their father died, the brothers feared that Joseph would take his revenge on them. Joseph had become the second in authority in all of Egypt, and the brothers knew he could do to them as he pleased, so they approached him carefully.

93. How did the brothers add psychological and spiritual force to their plea for forgiveness? Why did Joseph weep when he received their message? What may be seen in Joseph's "am I in the place of God?" (See Romans 12:17–21.)

94. How did Joseph look at everything he had experienced in life? What encourages us to look at life in the same way? (See Romans 8:28–39.)

95. How has God directed the course of your life so that you were ready at the opportune time to provide some significant service to the people around you?

96. How does this Old Testament Lesson tie in with today's Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 14:1–12

The Early Church, also in Rome, was a blend of Jew and Gentile. The Jewish Christians carried with them the traditions of Judaism and its ceremonial laws. Because these laws prescribing dietary restrictions and the careful observance of the Sabbath had been so important in the practice of their faith—setting them apart as the people of the covenant—they understandably continued to have conscience scruples about such matters as Christians. And they sometimes felt that Gentile Christians should also be expected to follow their rules.

Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and through the strong testimony of Peter, the question had been formally resolved at the Apostolic Council in Jerusalem in AD 50. It was decided that Gentile Christians were not to be burdened with Jewish rules—for also the Jewish Christians knew they were not saved by their observance of the laws of the old covenant, but only through faith in Jesus' gift of salvation. However, tensions over this question continued for some time. The Church in Rome included a large number of Jewish Christians, so Paul addressed the matter in his letter, speaking to the tensions between the “weak” and the “strong.”

97. As Paul wrote about them, who were the “weak” and who were the “strong”?

98. As Paul described the disagreement over sacred days and dietary rules, what was he mainly concerned about?

99. What principle for Christian living did Paul assert in dealing with this matter?

100. How could both sides in this issue be right?

101. Why did Paul expand his argument in this to include general statements about a Christian's living and dying to the Lord?

102. How are matters of indifference—matters simply of choice—to be decided in the life of a congregation?

Paul followed this with strong encouragement not to judge your brother in such matters. He reminded them—and reminds us—that each of us must stand before God's judgment seat. Paul bolstered this argument for the Jewish Christians by quoting Isaiah 45:23—and for the Gentile Christians, he added his own "each of us will give an account of himself to God." We will not give an account of the brother's actions; he will have to do that. But we will be accountable for our own approach to Christian discipleship and our expression of Christian freedom.