

Twenty-fourth Sunday OT – Year A – 9/17/17

There is an old native American proverb that says, “Don’t criticize another until you’ve in his/her moccasins.” European immigrants changed it by adding a few words, “Don’t criticize another until you’ve walked **a mile** in his/her **shoes**.” And this is the sentiment proclaimed into today’s gospel.

Fr. Karban notes in his commentary that “most people in the ancient world believed their only obligation to the gods was to keep them satisfied with the proper ritual sacrifices they expected several times a year. Once they did so, they were free to do whatever they wished. They had responsibilities to one another but not to the gods.

But flying in the face of this *laissez faire* theology, the God of the Israelites so identifies with people that what one does to those around him or her is looked upon as being done **to Yahweh**. That was a dramatic change in belief, yet it is the lynchpin of our moral theology.

That’s why the author of Sirach can ask the biting question found in today’s first reading: *Could anyone nourish anger against another and expect healing from God?* When we’re relating to others, we’re relating with God. Even more, God’s forgiveness is dependent on our forgiveness of others. Sirach writes: *Forgive your neighbor’s injustice, then when you pray, your own sins will be forgiven.* Nothing could be clearer.

As a good Jew, Matthew’s Jesus is also convinced of that process. His well-known story about the master’s two indebted servants hits home. If God has forgiven us an astronomical debt, how can we demand payment of the small debt others owe us? God can be counted on to forgive those who forgive... seventy-seven fold is a way of saying...as often as asked.

Paul’s insight in Romans is that *none of us lives for ourselves and none of us dies for ourselves...we are the Lord’s.*” Everything we do affects our relationship with the risen Jesus. The needs of others – **not our own needs** – are to become the center of our lives, the focus of our actions.”

And that is why Matthew’s parable is so powerful, the servant who had just walked in his fellow servant’s sandals and been forgiven, now refuses to forgive his brother who owed him a fraction of what he had owed. Why couldn’t he see that? But the question for all of us today is “**why can’t we see it?**” **And that’s harder to see when we don’t know the path other people have walked in life.** The Lord has mercy...how can we have mercy as we walk with the Christ day by day? How are we doing as we follow him? The Lord has mercy...how about us? It is easier said, than done.