

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost, 11/9/11, Holy Trinity

Matthew 18:21-35

As I was thinking about today as the tenth anniversary of the terrible events in the USA that literally changed the world, I concluded that it must take a tremendous amount of teaching for people to hate to the extent of committing suicide to bring about other peoples' death.

Likewise, the suicide bombers about whom we read almost daily must be taught that kind of hate towards other people.

It distresses me to think that hatred can be taught in the home or school, in a church, mosque or synagogue or anywhere else and that this can happen to anyone.

Last Sunday, Fr. Brian looked into chapter 18 of Matthew's Gospel leading up to today's reading.

It was part of the chapter dealing with people who go astray.

It dealt with conflict resolution with a message of compassion and forgiveness.

Today's reading emphasises forgiveness with a parable that may well have come from everyday life even if it is a bit exaggerated.

Jesus tells of a man who is not simply in debt but who owes a mountain of money that is impossible to repay.

Indeed no servant could amass a debt so large.

When the king cancels the debt, the man, now free of the burden, goes out to demand payment from a man who owes him a debt equal to about a hundred days' wages.

Don't allow the improbability of the situation to take us away from the point that is being made behind the story.

We are the debtors who have amassed a debt to God that is impossible to repay and who receive God's massive forgiveness.

God has not only given us life, continues to love us and wants the very best for us in spite of our actions falling short of the glory of God.

Our sins, our shortfall to God's glory, mount up higher and higher to the point where it is impossible for us to atone for them.

The other side of this coin is that God's forgiveness is also massive.

It is God's forgiveness for us time after time that frees us of the burden.

If our debt to God is massive then God's forgiveness is massive also.

Now what about the next part of the story?

Jesus' point is well made. If God forgives us on a massive scale we should go out to forgive others.

But aren't some acts too great to forgive?

World history is full of acts of evil.

Our living memory is jam packed with acts of evil.

How can we forgive those responsible for such acts?

The scriptures teach us two things in relation to this dilemma: first, judgement belongs to God alone and secondly, we are to forgive as we have been forgiven.

Jesus taught us to pray "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us".

Yet, forgiveness can be so difficult.

This can be true on a global scale with terrorist attacks but it can be equally difficult on a personal scale.

The trouble with not forgiving is that it is like a festering sore that is just left: it gradually takes over and hurts the whole body.

By not forgiving it can fester until it turns to hate.

Forgiveness does not mean forgetting, and reconciliation is not always possible.

We leave the judgement to God and pray for God's grace that will enable us to forgive.

We do not naturally let go of past hurts.

We need to be taught to let go of past hurts, to forgive and to love.

In forgiveness we face reality, the reality of our own debt to God, the reality of God's massive forgiveness.

Then there is the reality of the hurts from others that we endure and the need for us to wipe the debt, to forgive those who sin against us.

This is not easy but with the help of God's grace we can do it and be taught to forgive and to love.