

Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dear Parishioners and Friends,

When the relationship between two individuals or two communities breaks down, it generally takes time for healing and reconciliation to occur. The deeper the hurt, the more time is needed. The journey can be slow and difficult. It was C.S. Lewis who said: 'Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have someone to forgive.' We may be able to go a certain distance towards reconciliation reasonably quickly, but completing the journey will often take a lot of time.

In the parable that Jesus relates in today's gospel reading, the servant who owed the king a huge amount of money pleaded, 'Give me time and I will pay you.' Another servant who owed this first servant a relatively small sum of money pleaded with him in the same words, 'Give me time and I will pay you.' Both of them asked for time to put right a wrong they had done, to pay a debt that they owed. We need to give each other the gift of time, because it often takes time for people to come right. In the parable, however, neither of the two servants was given the time that they asked for. The king simply cancelled the huge debt of the first servant there and then. Time was dispensed with. The first servant had the second servant thrown into prison, with the result that he was deprived of the time that he needed to repay the debt. In this parable, Jesus appears to be drawing a sharp contrast between the way God relates to us and the way we often relate to each other. As the prophet Isaiah declared: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways", says the Lord.' In the parable, when both servants asked for time, they were thinking in terms of work. They needed time to work off what they owed. However, the king gave the servant what he was looking for before he had time to work for it.

The parable suggests that God does not ask us to work for the mercy that we need. The forgiveness that God extends to us when we sin is not a response to our efforts. Jesus reveals a God who gives generously to those who have nothing to offer. It can be difficult for us to comprehend the extent to which God is 'for us'. We can easily slip into the way of thinking that is expressed in the pleas of the servant, 'Give me time.' God has given us something much more precious than time. God has given and continues to give us his Son, and that extraordinary gift makes the gift of time superfluous. We do not need to ask to, 'Give me time.' We should try to apply the same principle to our relationships with our brothers and sisters. The more we recognise ourselves as forgiven sinners, the harder it will be to refuse the gift of time to those who have sinned against us.

Father Patrick