

We Respond

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ENTRANCE ANTIPHON (or a hymn) Give peace, O Lord, to those who wait for you, that your prophets be found true. Hear the prayers of your servant, and of your people Israel.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (Ps 102)

ANTIPHON: The Lord is kind and merciful; slow to anger and rich in compassion.

RESPONSE: The Lord is kind and merciful; slow to anger and rich in compassion.

LECTOR: My soul, give thanks to the Lord, all my being, bless his holy name.

My soul, give thanks to the Lord and never forget all his blessings. **R.**

LECTOR: It is he who forgives all your guilt, who heals every one of your ills, who redeems your life from the grave, who crowns you with love and compassion. **R.**

LECTOR: His wrath will come to an end; he will not be angry for ever. He does not treat us according to our sins nor repay us according to our faults. **R.**

LECTOR: For as the heavens are high above the earth so strong is his love for those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west so far does he remove our sins. **R.**

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION Alleluia, alleluia! I give you a new commandment: love one another as I have loved you. Alleluia!

COMMUNION ANTIPHON (or a hymn) How precious is your mercy, O God! The children of men seek shelter in the shadow of your wings.

Or

The chalice of blessing that we bless is a communion in the blood of Christ; and the bread that we break is a sharing in the body of the Lord.

TODAY'S READINGS Sirach 27:30-28:7; Roman 14:7-9; Matthew 18:21-35

NEXT WEEK (25th Sunday of Year A) Is 55:6-9; Ps 144; Philippians 1:20-24, 27; Mt 20:1-16

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God of Pardons



13 September 2020 24th Sunday Year A

The prophet Nehemiah (9:17) describes the Judeo-Christian deity as "a god of pardons". This expression is later picked up by other prophets (e.g., Joel 2:13), the Psalmists (86:15; 103:8-14), and even St Paul (2 Corinthians 1:3) – with good reason. Both the Ancient Israelites and the early Christians experienced the presence of God in significant events of liberation, mercy and forgiveness.

The God revealed to Moses was concerned for the plight of the Israelites enslaved in Egypt and wanted to see them liberated. The God that the Jewish prophets and mystics encountered in their prayer was one who sought to lead Israel both into and out of Exile in Babylon to cleanse them of their sins. The divine Word that the Apostles found expressed in Jesus was an offer of forgiveness to sinners.

The collective wisdom of the Biblical record is that the defining characteristics of Yahweh are mercy, compassion and forgiveness. One of the most beautiful expressions of this insight is found in Exodus 3:6-7, which describes Yahweh as "merciful and gracious, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness".

This is a key passage highlighting the fact that the concepts of mercy and forgiveness are related to that of faithfulness; that is, the faithfulness or "steadfast love" of Yahweh

vis-a-vis his covenantal promises. The story of the Bible is one of a people who constantly fail to live up to their side of the covenant with Yahweh; but Yahweh continues to forgive them and call them back into relationship.

Of course, this doesn't mean that the people of Yahweh are free to do as they will. The parable Jesus tells in today's gospel contrasts the merciful actions of a king with the duplicity and miserliness of his servant who, despite being the recipient of royal largesse, demands immediate payment from his debtors. The king reacts by reneging on his promise of forgiveness.

The point of this story is that repentant sinners are forgiven, while the impenitent, whose lives are not transformed and who continue to act without mercy to others, are not.

This story illustrates one of the lines of Matthew's Our Father, where Jesus suggests that we pray: "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors" (Matthew 6:12 NABRE). Similarly, in the Matthean Beatitudes, Jesus proclaims "blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy" (Matt 5:7).

The message of today's readings is that the first and best path to evangelisation is to mirror in our own lives the characteristics of our God, who has consistently been revealed to be a "god of pardons."

Ian J Elmer
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