



It is grace that God grips us with, so that we remain his very own people as we go through life. Sometimes - it is true - we give in to sin's power, even throwing away our birth right, but still, the Father looks on us with ownership and a love that can never be diluted.

After listening to Jesus speak to him and to the other disciples about how to treat a brother or sister who has sinned against them, Peter comes to Jesus and asks him

"Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me?  
Up to seven times?"

And Jesus gives his famous answer "I tell you not seven times, but seventy seven times".

And then Jesus tells a parable about how the Kingdom of heaven is comparable to a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants - and how one of these servants - even though he is forgiven a massive debt by his master - fails to be equally forgiving of a fellow servant who owes him only a small debt.

"You wicked servant" says the master to the one he had forgiven so much,

"I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to.

Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?"

And in anger his master turned him over to the jailors, until he should pay back all he owed.

Serious food for thought, don't you think? Especially when you remember the "punch line" of the parable which Jesus solemnly delivers.

"This", says Jesus, "is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you each forgive your brother from your heart."

We could call this parable alarming or shocking, because most of us find it difficult to forgive.

But, we can be reassured - If we are worried about being unable to forgive someone one time, let alone seventy seven times, there is something we can do about it.

And that *something* is this: surrender your judgement to God, and keep praying the prayer that Jesus taught, and pray it with deep earnestness. The *Our Father* is surely the perfection of prayer. When we rush through it as if it were just a list of words, then we surely do God no favours, and do ourselves no favours either.

What begins as prayer, when said unthinkingly, unlovingly, untruly, ends up a nothing.

Pray the prayer of Christ and savour the grace of God of which our Psalm sings this Sunday:

*The Lord is compassion and love, slow to anger and rich in mercy,*

Sin is sin - and it does hurt -

and yet God removes it from us *as far as the east is from the west;*

he forgives us,

he has compassion on us, *like a father has for his children,*

*like a mother has for her child.*

If we are to become spiritually mature and not bland people, we indeed need to savour what this Psalm and the *Our Father* can mean for us.

To become spiritually mature, you need think of how God has shown love for you, shown forgiveness to you,

even before you asked, even before you thought to ask.

Our salvation is not lost by one act of malice,

or even by a series of such acts.

It can only be lost if we commit what the scriptures call the unforgivable sin, the sin against the Holy Spirit the sin which we understand to be the denial of God and God's power, the denial of the truth of God, that seeks to leaven our life.

**The truth of God is that God is forgiving.**

The power of God is the power to help us stand firm and to show that truth to others, by the love we give.

