

BRINGING HOME THE GOSPEL

September 13, 2020 • 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time • Matthew 18:21–35

Forgiveness

Jesus is asked how many times we must forgive someone. “Is seven times enough?” a follower asks. Jesus tells them, “Not seven times, but seven times seven.” Jesus goes on to tell a parable about a worthless servant whose huge debt is mercifully forgiven. However, when the servant then refuses mercy to a fellow servant for a much smaller debt, the master punishes him.

Forgiveness is a tricky thing. Sometimes it is easy to forgive: something is broken accidentally or someone unknowingly steps on our toes. But at other times it is not so easy; someone will do something or say something and we want to strike back. That impulse is even stronger in small children who are just beginning to learn to temper their feelings.

I remember years ago watching my daughter-in-law Deborah comfort her three year old as he screamed and kicked his frustration. “Use your words,” she kept saying in a calm voice. Her one arm was around him as the other gently rubbed his back. Given the time to express his hurt and anger, Nicholas settled down and the story came out.

His playmate had punched him, and he wanted payback. After a few minutes of listening and some quiet soothing, Deborah was able to counsel her little one into a more appropriate response.

My grandson’s reaction is fairly common. It seems a natural response to strike out when we have been struck, to hit back harder, to yell louder. Yet as Christians we are called to follow Jesus, learning from the cross a lesson that rejects the proverb, “an eye for eye” and sets a new agenda for the world. We are asked to forgive seven times seven.

Deborah set a wise path for her youngster. It is one we can all follow and foster in our families.

Take time to settle down before responding in anger or frustration and then “use your words.”

Sometimes that means going to the offending party and talking things out. It might mean finding a good listener to help counsel. Finally, it is always a good idea to ask God’s help. As I watched Deb comfort Nicholas, I thought of what a beautiful image she was of God—the loving parent—always there to listen, soothe, counsel, and love.

FAMILY RESPONSE

Practice talking out a problem. Ask a family member who is angry with someone to share the story behind his anger. Help him to consider ways he can solve the problem in a positive way.

PERSONAL RESPONSE

What is your primary worry this week? What alternatives do you have in solving this concern? Where is God in this problem? What do you want to remember from last week? What are you looking forward to next week? What are your concerns?