

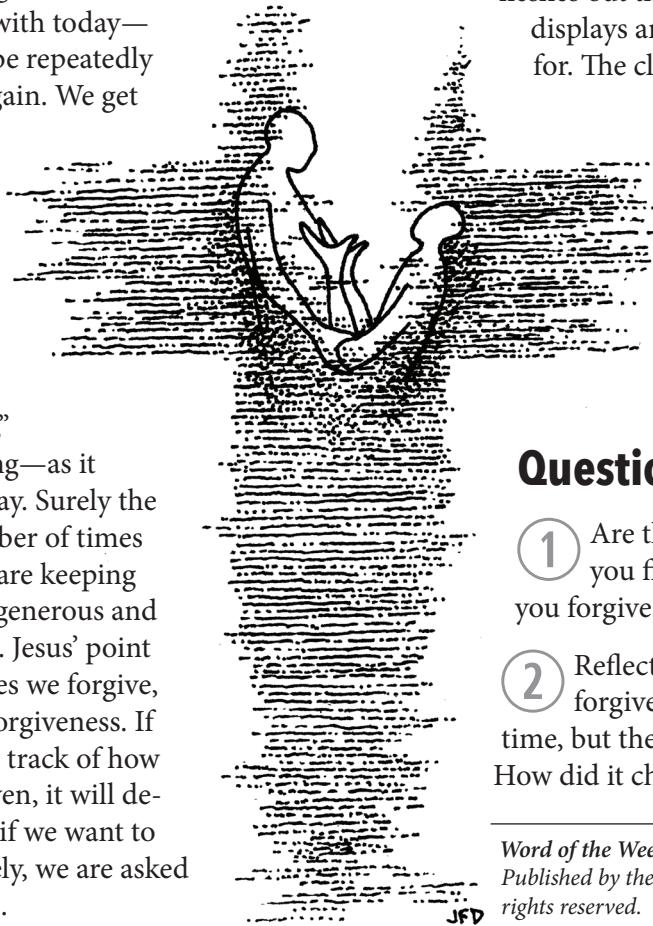
# A Serious Business

*This Week's Readings at Mass*

- ▶ Sirach 27:30-28:7 - Call to forgiveness and mercy
- ▶ Romans 14:7-9 - To live and die for Christ
- ▶ Matthew 18:21-35 - The merciless official

Jesus was an extraordinary teacher, but most of his teachings weren't "new" or "original;" he drew them from the wealth of his Jewish traditions and scripture. We see an example of this today in his teachings about forgiveness after reading from Sirach's instructions on the subject. Sirach wrote about 150-200 years before Jesus' time. On his part, Sirach based some of his teachings on wisdom from even earlier in Jewish history.

This is the second week in a row we read some of Jesus' teaching about the importance of forgiveness. Peter's question about how many times we must forgive someone else (seven times?) suggests that in their day people struggled with what some of us still struggle with today—forgiving others only to be repeatedly hurt and disappointed again. We get the sense that Peter may have thought he was generous in offering to forgive someone seven times. Jesus' answer, which can be translated either as "77 times" or "70 times seven times," would have been shocking—as it probably still is to us today. Surely the point isn't the exact number of times we forgive because if we are keeping count, we aren't entirely generous and free with our forgiveness. Jesus' point is not the number of times we forgive, but the "quality" of our forgiveness. If we imagine God keeping track of how many times we are forgiven, it will detract from the mercy. So if we want to be forgiven fully and freely, we are asked to do the same for others.



"Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant, as I had pity on you?"

**Sheepish Question:**  
Who have I failed to forgive? Why?  
Who has surprised me with mercy?

The parable about the merciless official which follows fleshes out the spirit of forgiveness that God displays and which Jesus asks us to reach for. The closing warning or threat of punishment for those who do not forgive suggests how seriously Jesus wants his listeners to take this issue. We may not like the image of a Father God who will torture those who are not merciful, but it serves to wake us up to the graveness of the issue at hand.

## Questions of the Week

- 1 Are there situations or people whom you find easier to forgive, and whom you forgive repeatedly?
- 2 Reflect on an experience of struggling to forgive someone, perhaps for a very long time, but then finding the freedom to do so. How did it change you?