

- Our Gospel today begins with an interesting exchange between Jesus and Peter. Peter asks Jesus: “Lord, how many times must I forgive someone who sins against me?” And Jesus basically replies there is no limit, you must keep forgiving (77 times in Hebrew numerology meant a very long time).
- What I find interesting is that in a few short weeks after this exchange, when Jesus is arrested, Peter will sin against Jesus. Peter will deny knowing Jesus three separate times in order to save his own skin.
- In that conversation in today’s Gospel, Jesus teaches us all about forgiveness, but there was also a personal message for Peter; something Jesus wanted Peter to know that would help Peter later on.
- Let’s look at what happened to two of Jesus’ followers right after Jesus death. Judas, the one who handed Jesus over to be arrested, was sick with grief over his sin against Jesus. Peter, the one who denied knowing Jesus, wept bitterly over his sin against Jesus.
- The two men were devastated. Judas couldn’t imagine that his sin could ever be forgiven – so he took his own life. Peter’s story, as we know, ended quite differently. Perhaps in his most sorrowful moment , Peter remembered that conversation with Jesus – the one we just read. The one where Jesus told Peter there must be no limit to the number of times we forgive. That message gave Peter hope that just maybe Jesus could, Jesus would - forgive him. Peter trusted in that message and it gave him healing; gave him his life back. We know the rest of Peter’s story.
- Forgiveness brings hope; brings healing; and brings new life.
- Why did Jesus forgive Peter? Why does God forgive us?
- The answer is in today’s second reading from St. Paul. Paul tells us simply: “We are the Lords”.
- Paul reminds us we belong to God.

- As humans we often think : “ No one owns me, I’m independent, my own person” But the truth is we do belong to God. He created us; breathes life into us; cares about us; provides for us and is always close to us. God loves you fiercely – you belong to him. I belong to Him – and I’m just fine with that!!
- And so God forgives us when we stumble, when we stray. But this forgiveness comes with a condition. If we want God to forgive us we must forgive others. Jesus teaches this lesson in the story of the king and the wicked servant. We must forgive as we are forgiven!
- And Jesus also told us to pray for the strength to forgive: because it does take strength. When Jesus taught us to pray to God our Father , He included these challenging words: “*And forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us*”. Jesus tells us : don’t be afraid to ask God for forgiveness. God waits for us. When we repent and seek forgiveness we are restored to God’s love and protection. God forgives – it is His nature. But there is more to this sentence in the prayer. Jesus tells us there is a sure way we can know God has forgiven us. There is proof, a sign.
- And that sign is this miracle: We can forgive others. When we ask for the grace, the love and forgiveness of God enters into us and changes our hearts. We get the courage to put aside our ego, our anger, our hurt feelings and we can forgive others. It is a tremendous power God gives to us if we just ask. Wow!
- When we see this divinity come from within us, that is our sure sign God has forgiven us.
- I’d like to conclude with a true story that demonstrates this power God gives us.
- When Nelson Mandela left prison after 27 years, he could have called for vengeance, he did not, he called for forgiveness.
- He called upon his old friend, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and asked him to serve as chairperson of the “Truth and Reconciliation Committee”, a court like body that investigated human rights violations after the end of racial segregation in South Africa. The rules of the Commissions hearings were

simple: the perpetrators had to tell the truth, the whole truth, and their victims were given the opportunity to forgive.

- Many of the atrocities heard at the hearings were horrific. One policeman named Mr. Van de Brock, told of how he and his fellow officers shot an 18-year-old youth and then burnt the body. Eight years later those same officers went back, took the father and forced his wife to watch as he was incinerated.
- The wife was in court to hear this confession and was asked by the judge what she wanted. She replied: “Mr. Van de Brock took all my family away from me and I still have a lot of love to give. Twice per month, I would like for him to come to my town and spend a day with me so I can be a mother to him”.
- “And I would like Mr. Van de Brock to know that he is forgiven by God and that I forgive him too. I would like to embrace him so he can know my forgiveness is real.”
- Spontaneously, many in the courtroom began singing “Amazing Grace” as the elderly woman made her way to Mr. Van de Brock. But Mr. Van de Brock did not hear the hymn - he had fainted, overwhelmed by this act of love.
- Many times God sends us special people, like this elderly South African woman to set an example for us. In this case , an example of the extent to which we are called to forgive and love.
- And to show us that real hope; real healing; real peace and new life come from the ability to love and forgive from our heart.