

Unforgiveness Third Week of Lent Tuesday, March 26, 2019 Dn 3:25, 34-43; **Mt 18:21-35** (Keeping accounts is completely incompatible with the teachings of Christ.)

“So will my heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives your brother from your heart.”

As I read the New Testament, this is **as close as Jesus ever gets to talking about hell**, because the very idea of hell is some sort of perpetual torment, some everlasting alienation from God. And this is the only time I know he ever speaks in exactly so many words about an **everlasting alienation from God**, about a torment that never ends. But what is it based on? It’s based upon one thing; only one sin creates this. You could put it in this way: **according to Jesus, there is only one real mortal sin, and that is the sin of unforgiveness**. Is that too strong? Well, perhaps it is. Parables tend to be strong; they tend to exaggerate. You may play with this as you will.

But two things must be said about this. First of all, that **unforgiveness begins**, not with an offense, but rather **with keeping accounts**. I have dealt with people who talk about their **parents** in terms of what they failed to do for them. They are keeping accounts. They are remembering all their disappointments, their letdowns. And this itself is a very dangerous way to think. **Keeping accounts is completely incompatible with the teachings of Christ**. We need to **wipe the slate clean of the debts we hold people to**, and debts are not necessarily monetary. **Most debts are emotional**, and that’s what is really being meant here.

Now you might say, but **what about real harm?** What about people who really assaulted, invaded, robbed, abused, what about that? **All the more reason we have to work together as a community to bring healing to those who have been so injured. We cannot allow injury to be a reason for someone to be alienated from God**, and injury happens. **There are always going to**

be injuries in this world. But two things: some injuries are really and truly deep and profound, but even the deepest and most profound injury is not beyond the healing power of divine mercy. Second of all, frankly, **many injuries are imaginary. They are really based upon a standard we have invented to which we hold others accountable,** a standard we have no business inventing in the first place. If we are to be truthful, and this is a good time as any to examine ourselves, we can recognize that **we are too demanding,** especially of **those that we have served, or who are in our sphere of influence, or family, or business. We do for others, and then we expect something in return,** exactly the opposite of what Jesus recommended in the gospel of Ash Wednesday.