

Today I will not tell a joke or story but real incident which took place in my home state in India.

On November 4, 2017, Sr. Rani Maria, A Franciscan Clarist nun was beatified in the presence of about 20 thousand people. The chief among those present in the crowd was a man by name Samander Singh who had murdered Sr. Rani Maria.

Sr. Rani Maria, 41-year-old nun from South India was working as a missionary in North India among the poor, downtrodden and untouchables educating them of their rights. This angered the upper caste money lenders and landlords who used to exploit these simple, illiterate villagers. So, they hired some contract killers to kill Sr. Rani Maria.

And on that fateful day of February 25, 1995, Sr. Rani Maria was travelling in a crowded bus to catch at train to go to visit her home in southern India. In the middle of a dense forest the contract killers forced the driver to stop the bus. In the clear view of all the passengers, Sr. Rani Maria was stabbed at least 54 times and left on the road side to die. All the three contract killers were caught but, two were released on bail. Only the main killer who did the stabbing was given life sentence.

After about 7 years in prison, August 21, 2002 was an unforgettable day for this murderer Mr. Singh as he got a visitor in the prison he would not have expected in his wildest dream. The visitor was none other than the younger sister of the slain nun, herself a nun called Sr. Selmy, in the same Congregation. Mr. Singh was shivering when he stood before her with his hands folded and weeping. "We have forgiven you. Do not keep anything in your heart," Sister Selmy said to him and tied a rakhi, a cotton thread, on his wrist which in Indian culture symbolizes making some one as one's brother.

Earlier her mother had said she would kiss those hands because they had the blood of her daughter on them. The family of the slain nun also worked with the lawyers to get Mr. Singh out of prison on parole.

After out of prison, Mr. Singh the killer, visited the slain nun's family in Kerala south India and could not believe that the family of the woman whom he murdered had forgiven him and embraced him as their own son.

Journalists often asked the family members of the slain nun with questions like, "It is very difficult to forgive someone who has hurt us. How was it that you could forgive someone who had murdered your own sister for no fault of hers?"

Or "How could you forgive the man who killed your sister or daughter?"

"We can only say that it was done by the grace of God. It was not our will but God's will," the family replied.

This is the real example of forgiveness by real people. You might have come across similar acts of forgiveness in your own lives. And if you have done similar act of forgiveness then I salute you. Yes, Forgiveness with capital F is the main theme of this Sunday's readings.

In the first reading of today Sirach tells us that we must forgive our neighbor if we want God to forgive our own sins. We must be merciful if we want to obtain mercy from God. We must not seek revenge on a neighbor of ours lest God should take vengeance on us.

In the responsorial psalm we just sang, "*The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness.*"

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In today’s Gospel, through the parable of the two debtors, Jesus teaches us that there should be no limit to our forgiveness and no conditions attached to our reconciliation. We represent the greater debtor in the parable because we commit sins every day and, hence, we need God’s forgiveness every day. But we must forgive in order to be forgiven.

Forgiving those who have hurt us is not easy. The bigger the hurt the more difficult it is to forgive and for many people also the longer it takes to forgive. From the question of Peter we can see Peter also was going through the struggle of forgiving some one. At the time of Jesus there was a common understanding among Jews to forgive only three times. When Peter asked Jesus if he should forgive seven times he was being generous, more than double what was expected at the time. Jesus responded, not just seven times, but seventy-seven times. There are no limits to his forgiveness

We have all been hurt in some way or other in the journey of life—made fun of in school by a teacher, not invited to the wedding, didn’t get the job I thought I should have got, or at a more serious level, betrayed by someone you trusted, abused physically or sexually and so on.

We may never forget the hurt we have experienced, but we can, with His ongoing grace, choose to forgive and pray for our offenders. And it is doable by God’s grace the example I gave clearly verifies.

In this Mass today we celebrate Jesus dying on Cross for the forgiveness of our sins. Because of his sacrifice on the cross each one’s huge amount of debt of sins we owe to God are forgiven. In turn we are required to forgive only the petty sum of debt who offend us. Pray to God to get strength to forgive.