

Tuesday of the Third Week of Lent (Leader)

Opening Prayer: We ask you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to join us and lead us in this scripture meditation. May Jesus, through His Word, lead us to Our Father. May we rest in Our Father's presence and be inspired by the Holy Spirit as we read, reflect, respond, and rest.

Introduction to the Text (Matthew 18: 21-35): This is part of the discourse often called the "church order" discourse, but it lacks most of the considerations usually connected with church order, such as various offices in the church and the duties of each, and deals principally with the relations that must obtain among the members of the church. Beginning with the warning that greatness in the kingdom of heaven is measured not by rank or power but by childlikeness (Mt 18:1-5), it deals with the care that the disciples must take not to cause the little ones to sin or to neglect them if they stray from the community (Mt 18:6-14), the correction of members who sin (Mt 18:15-18), the efficacy of the prayer of the disciples because of the presence of Jesus (Mt 18:19-20), **and the forgiveness that must be repeatedly extended to sinful members who repent (Mt 18:21-35).**

Lectio Divina Process: Read (*Lectio*), Reflect (*Meditatio*), Respond (*Oratio*), Rest (*Contemplatio*)

1. First Reading: We begin as we read (*Lectio*) Matthew 18:21-35. During the reading, focus on question #1 below. We will pause for 2 to 3 minutes after the reading for you to reflect (*Meditatio*) and share a word or phrase from the reading. You may write the word or phrase in the space below the question. In the quiet, it will help to repeat it in your mind and to reflect on it.

2. Question 1: What is one word or phrase the Holy Spirit impresses on you? In silence meditate on that.

35 ...unless each of you forgives his brother from his heart... innumerable times (22)

3. First Response: You are now invited to share your word or phrase. We will reflect on the shared word or phrase **without explanation or commentary**. It may help to **circle the words or phrases shared to see the group's focus**.

4. Second Reading: We will now read (*Lectio*) our scripture passage a second time. As we read the scripture, focus on question #2 below. Imagine yourself there in the scripture. We will pause for 2 to 3 minutes of silence, then you will be invited to share your feelings and/or a short personal prayer (*Oratio*), your response to the Word. You may write your response in the space provided.

5. Question 2: What do you **feel**? What **specific situation** in your life today relates to the scripture or to the word or phrase you have chosen.? Write down your feelings, how the scripture relates to you and/or a **prayer**.

How do you feel: I feel challenged to imitate God's mercy towards those who have hurt me the most,

Specific situation: I recall abuse situations in my life and family resentments that challenge me to forgive as God would forgive.

Prayer: Lord, that I may learn to imitate your ways of mercy.

Others: _____

6. Second Response: You are now invited to share your response to question #2. Group members may express words of support without judgment. Advice and reassurance are left to God in silence.

7. Third Reading: We will now read (*Lectio*) our scripture passage a third time. During the reading, we focus on question #3 below. In 2 to 3 minutes of silent rest and quiet (*Contemplatio*) after the reading, you can write down what you sense God may be saying to you and/or offer a prayer of thanks for what God is showing you. Imagine resting in God's presence and repeating your word or phrase seeking meaning. Ending the silence: *In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

8. Question 3: What is God's personal invitation to you from the Scripture? You can write down **what the Lord may be saying** to you and/or a **prayer of thanks**. Or simply rest quietly in the Spirit's presence.

What the Lord is saying (action): Continue to forgive those who have offended you every time they pop into your mind. Say a prayer for their salvation and pray also for anyone you have offended when they come to mind. I will be merciful as you are merciful.

A prayer of thanks: Thank you Lord for your directions in dealing with those who have offended me and those whom I have offended. Please give me the strength to follow your will.

Others: _____

9. Third Response: You are now invited to share your response to question #3. We listen with **prayerful empathy without needing to give judgment, advice, or assurance**.

10. Closing Prayer: We **praise** you, Lord, for bring us together. We **thank** you for your insights on how we are to forgive. We **pray for those in need of prayer**. For John Thomas' recovery from shoulder surgery, for the homeless in our community, for [the prayer intentions of our group members] _____...and for all the prayer intentions in our hearts) Our Father

11. Announcements: Have a great week.

Gospel: Matthew 18: 21-35 The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant.*

21 Then Peter approaching asked him, “Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him? As many as seven times?”

22 Jesus answered, “I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times.

23 That is why the kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king who decided to settle accounts with his servants.

24 When he began the accounting, a debtor was brought before him who owed him a huge amount.

25 Since he had no way of paying it back, his master ordered him to be sold, along with his wife, his children, and all his property, in payment of the debt.

26 At that, the servant fell down, did him homage, and said, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back in full.’

27 Moved with compassion the master of that servant let him go and forgave him the loan.

28 When that servant had left, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a much smaller amount. He seized him and started to choke him, demanding, ‘Pay back what you owe.’

29 Falling to his knees, his fellow servant begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.’

30 But he refused. Instead, he had him put in prison until he paid back the debt.

31 Now when his fellow servants saw what had happened, they were deeply disturbed, and went to their master and reported the whole affair.

32 His master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you your entire debt because you begged me to.

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

34 Then in anger his master handed him over to the torturers until he should pay back the whole debt.

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

From: <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/matthew/18> This approach to *Lectio Divina* is based on <https://www.soulshpherd.org/lectio-divina-groups/>