

**ENTRANCE ANTIPHON** (or a hymn) Give peace, O Lord, to those who wait for you, that your prophets be found true. Hear the prayers of your servant, and of your people Israel.

**RESPONSORIAL PSALM** (Ps 102)

**ANTIPHON:** The Lord is kind and merciful; slow to anger and rich in compassion.

**RESPONSE:** **The Lord is kind and merciful; slow to anger and rich in compassion.**

**LECTOR:** My soul, give thanks to the Lord, all my being, bless his holy name. My soul, give thanks to the Lord and never forget all his blessings. **R.**

**LECTOR:** It is he who forgives all your guilt, who heals every one of your ills, who redeems your life from the grave, who crowns you with love and compassion. **R.**

**LECTOR:** His wrath will come to an end; he will not be angry for ever. He does not treat us according to our sins nor repay us according to our faults **R.**

**LECTOR:** For as the heavens are high above the earth so strong is his love for those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west so far does he remove our sins. **R.**

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION** Alleluia, alleluia! I give you a new commandment: love one another as I have loved you. Alleluia!

**COMMUNION ANTIPHON** (or a hymn) How precious is your mercy, O God! The children of men seek shelter in the shadow of your wings.

**Or**

The chalice of blessings that we bless is a communion in the blood of Christ; and the bread that we break is a sharing in the body of the Lord.

**TODAY'S READINGS** Sirach 27:30-28:7; Roman 14:7-9; Matthew 18:21-35

**NEXT WEEK** (25th Sunday of Year A) Is 55:6-9; Ps 144; Philippians 1:20-24, 27; Mt 20:1-16

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*Love is the  
greater  
power*



**17 September 2023 24th Sunday Year A**

A wandering preacher's violent execution by a long-gone empire a couple thousand years ago is the salvation of the world? That eccentric rabbi is the king of heaven and earth? Are you joking? He said what? It is more blessed to give than to receive? He taught who will inherit the earth? Everybody knows what happens to the meek: they lose. Every time. If I strike you, and you turn the other cheek, I won. Right?

If they remind you of anything, today's readings from Sirach and from the gospel recall the equally startling line in the Our Father: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." The petition makes our forgiveness by God contingent on our forgiving others. It's terribly sobering. It's also deeply rooted in the hopes and aspirations of the historical people of God in their (our) covenant with the Creator.

Let us reflect on the Christian account of true power: Anger slams a door, gentleness waits patiently; arrogance thrusts itself to the front, humility withdraws to the back; strife loudly divides into pieces, peace quietly smooths out; revenge grasps and squeezes, forgiveness lets go; hatred pushes, love embraces. Which is more powerful? "Love is stronger than death," says the author of the Song of Songs. If death is most evidently the greatest power in the world, then what is love? Love is stronger, greater, more powerful in what it effects than death.

Of course, love's greatness of power—even over death—is not evident. If you have suffered the death of a loved one, for example, you are certainly confronted with this fact. No matter how much you love him or her, death has caused a definitive breach between you. Love seems impotent, weak, non-effective in the face of death.

Death makes an aggressive claim to be the greatest and most universal power there is. Faith, however, says death is not definitive, not absolute. Faith says love is greater, definitive, absolute, universal.

If Jesus rose from the dead on the third day, if he overcame death, then his suffering on the Cross meant something. It meant, in the first place, that love is stronger than death. Faith seems faint, yet, in reality, it is the epitome of force. Forgiveness seems weak, yet, in reality, it enacts a profound degree of strength. Love appears impotent, but, in reality, it is the greatest power there is.

So, how does this reflection help us understand the line from the Our Father? If forgiveness is the greater social power—disarming antagonism, healing hostility, transforming enemies into partners and foes into friends—then in the prayer we are seeking to be the kind of people that belong to and live from his ultimate Kingdom—that Kingdom where love rules, where forgiveness is the condition of entry.

**W Chris Hackett**  
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