May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.

“How often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” Jesus answered Peter, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.”

Does that mean the drunk driver? Yes. The cheating spouse? Yes. The lying businessman? Yes. The racist? Yes. The rapist? Yes. The bully? Yes. The abusive parent? Yes. The persecution of Christians? Yes. Even the terrorists around the world? Yes.

Look at the history of the world and you will see the Hitler’s Holocaust, the genocides of Stalin, racial discrimination, wars all around the world. Look at your own lives and you will find broken promises, hurt feelings, betrayals, harsh words, physical and emotional wounds. Every one of us could tell stories of being hurt or victimized by another. Beneath the pain, the wounds, the losses, and the memories lies the question of forgiveness.

Forgiveness is the only way forward. That does not mean we forget or approve of what was done. It does not mean we ignore or excuse cruelty or injustice. It means we are released from them. We let go of the thoughts and fantasies of revenge. We look to the future rather than the past. We try to see and love as God sees and loves. Forgiveness is a way in which we align our life with God’s life.

God’s forgiveness and human forgiveness are integrally related. That is more than apparent in today’s parable. The king forgives his slave an extraordinary amount. Ten thousand talents is about 3000 years of work at the ordinary daily wage. It seems there is no debt too large to be forgiven. This man, this debtor, was forgiven. That’s what the kingdom of heaven is like. That’s how our God is. This slave, however, refused to forgive his fellow slave 100 denarii, about three months of work at the ordinary daily wage. Too often that’s what our world is like. Frequently, it is how we are. In that refusal the forgiven slave lost his own forgiveness.

Most of you pray it everyday. “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” We pray those words with ease and familiarity but do we live our prayer? Do our actions support our request? “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.”

We need to forgive as much, maybe more, for ourselves as for the one we forgive. Forgiving those who trespass against us is the salve that begins to heal our wounds. It may not change the one who hurt you but I promise you this. Your life will be more alive, more grace-filled, more whole, more God-like for having forgiven another.

Forgiveness creates space for new life. Forgiveness is an act of hopefulness and resurrection for the one who forgives. It is the healing of our soul and life. Forgiveness takes us out of darkness into light, from death to life. It is the letting go of the thoughts, the hatred, the fear that fill us so that we might live and love again.

So how do we begin to forgive? Forgiving another takes time and work. It is something we must practice every day. It begins with recognition and thanksgiving that we have been forgiven. Hanging between two thieves Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them” (Lk. 23:34). That is the cry of infinite forgiveness, a cry we are to echo in our own lives, in our families, our work places, our parishes, our day to day life.

Forgiveness does not originate in us. It begins with God. That’s what the slave who refused to forgive didn’t understand. It was not about him. It’s about God. We do not choose to forgive. We only choose to share the forgiveness we have already received. Then we chose again, and then again, and then yet again. For most of us forgiveness is a process that we live into. Sometimes, however, we just can’t. The pain is too much, the wound too raw, the memories too real. On those days we chose to want to forgive. Somedays we chose to want to want to forgive. Then there are those days that all we can do is choose to want to want to want to forgive. But we choose because that’s the choice Christ made.

How many times must we choose to forgive? Tell me this. How many times have you been hurt and suffered by the actions or words of another? How many times has anger or fear controlled you? How many times has the thought of revenge filled you? How many times have you replayed in your head the argument with another? That’s how many times you choose. With each choosing we move a step closer to forgiveness.

“Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.” Amen.