

Reflection for the Twenty Fourth Sunday of the Church's Year

“Ten thousand talents” is an awful lot of money. While it is not possible to be precise it is probably worth around £2.5 million at today's values. *“One hundred denarii”* is also a significant sum - £4,000 or £5,000 in today's money –a sum most of us couldn't afford to write off but certainly not in the same league as £2.5 million. It seems absurd, even highly irresponsible, that the king should allow one of his servants to run up such a huge debt. But we must remember that this parable is a comparison of the kingdom of heaven and so the king is taking the place of God himself who is indeed lavish with his generosity. And we, like the servant in today's gospel, we have no means of repaying God for his lavishness. All that is expected of us is that we should treat each other with the same generosity with which God treats us. And that is the lesson which the servant in the gospel has failed to grasp. *“One hundred denarii”* (£4-5,000) is indeed a sum most of us couldn't afford to write off but, having just had a debt of *“ten thousand talents”* (£2.5 million) cancelled, the servant is challenged to find the same generosity in his own heart which he singularly fails to do.

Instead his heart is full of the *“foul things”* described in our first reading from the book of Ecclesiasticus, full of *“resentment and anger”*. He does indeed *“nurture anger against another”*, he *“cherishes resentment”* and he shows *“no pity for a man like himself”*. How then can *“he demand compassion from the Lord”* or *“plead for his own sins”*? He hasn't a leg to stand on! And, in the words of Ecclesiasticus *“he who exacts vengeance will experience the vengeance of the Lord”*.

At the start of today's gospel St Peter asks: *“Lord, how often must I forgive my brother if he wrongs me? As often as seven times?”* We are not told why Peter asked this question. Had any of the others hurt him, taken advantage of him, done him a wrong? Did he have a running feud with someone? We don't know but in response to his question Jesus teaches him that, just as God does, he must forgive and forgive again. Today's scriptures have a clear focus on the scale of God's forgiveness and the ugliness of harbouring resentments.