

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord.

Then Peter came and said to him, 'Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. 'For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything." And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow-slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, "Pay what you owe." Then his fellow-slave fell down and pleaded with him, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you." But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow-slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, "You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow-slave, as I had mercy on you?" And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he should pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.' This is the Gospel of the Lord. This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ

"A learning people in a time of change".

Today, we pray for all those involved with education, giving thanks for the wisdom and skills of teachers, for the care and encouragement our schools and colleges provide, and for our own learning. Jesus himself was a teacher, which means that he was also a pupil learning to read and study the Scriptures. Legend has it that his father Joseph taught Jesus to be a carpenter - and we give thanks for all who follow in his footsteps.

The arrival of Christianity in our own land, and in countries across the world has traditionally been accompanied with increasing numbers of teachers and schools. We, like our Muslim and Jewish brothers and sisters, are people of the Book - people who learn about God through reading the Scriptures, and so learning to read and write was essential to salvation.

Even today, churches and people of faith are often at the forefront of bringing schools to places where they're desperately needed. Our own Christ Church primary was founded in the 1870s out of a desire to ensure that all the children of this parish would benefit from the gift of education, giving them opportunities to learn the skills that would give them a better quality of life, both materially and spiritually. The other schools in the parish have these same principles of Christian faith underpinning much of our education system, even in today's more secular world.

After the last six months, education has been disrupted like never before. Many families have told me of their struggles with homeschooling and the energy and imagination needed to teach children on a daily basis. And for some, that has been a precious time of learning, not so much academically, as more a learning about each other, about relationships and quality time and family life. And that got me thinking - what are our schools and lessons and systems all about?

As schools and colleges return this month, the education they offer is two fold. You might know the saying, 'give a man a fish and he eats for a day, teach a man to fish and he eats for life.' Education is about the skills we need, skills to pay the bills, whether learning to read, do maths, tell a story, or build a house.

But education, especially seen through Christian eyes, is also about the things that can never be measured. Learning about who you are as a person, what makes you come alive, what you give to those around you as well as the depths and power of God's love and forgiveness. Like the learning of skills and facts, this kind of education is lifelong - as Saint Peter demonstrates for us in our Gospel today.

Jesus tells a story to teach us about how important forgiveness is. Jesus doesn't just tell us to seek forgiveness, over and above what one might reasonably be expected to bear. The lesson is that forgiveness needs to be lived out. The slave is expected to learn what a joy and mercy it is to receive forgiveness, and to share that with his fellow slave who is also in debt.

We're asked to forgive others with the same strength and mercy as we ourselves have received. It's a tough lesson in what goes around, comes around - and in treating our neighbours with empathy, as we wish to be treated ourselves. A lesson that isn't just learnt at school, but in our life experience, and in our own journey of faith with God as we learn just how powerful that forgiveness can be in our own lives.

{And that's why the lesson from the story of the Exodus is in our appointed readings for today. When God's people escaped from slavery in Egypt, and began their journey towards freedom in the Promised Land, they learnt a lot about how powerful God's promises were, and how they were expected to live in light of those promises. As the times changed around them, day by day they learned more and more. }

So too when St Paul wrote to the new church in Rome. Day by day, the new Christians were learning both the facts and figures of their new faith, but also who they were as Christians and how they were to live together and follow Christ. As the times changed around them, as they responded to persecution and attack - they learned more and more.

Paul argues that what is important is that we have the discussion, we talk through our beliefs and opinions - so that we continue to grow in faith, knowledge and understanding. Education is about change, growing deeper and wiser as we learn from the situations around us.

But Paul reminds us that is only possible because God is constant - his love, his care, his assurance never falter - so that we can always draw on that strength when we are faced with new or difficult lessons to learn. None of us can ever truly know the mind of God, yet the more we learn, the more God teaches us about ourselves, and just how much we are loved, and precious in his sight.

As we pray for our schools and education system today, we pray for the pupils learning more of the experiences and skills that will equip them to have a better quality of life, both materially and spiritually. We pray for ourselves, as we continue to learn lessons about the unchanging power of God's love and the demands that places on how we live our lives. And we pray for all who teach, that by their wisdom and example they point us closer to the one who teaches us more about our selves and about God's promises - Jesus Christ, our teacher and Lord. Amen.