42A Homily for the Twenty-Fourth Sunday of the Ordinary Time Year A

There is a beautiful cultural tradition in Japan: When a bowl is broken in Japan, it’s put back together with the cracks being filled with gold. This is to emphasise the beauty in what was once broken. They believe when something has suffered damage, broken and cracked, it reminds two things to them:

# Firstly, it has a history and it is a gentle reminder of its initial glory.

# Secondly, though once it is broken, now gold that is being filled into the cracks gives new significance, new meaning, new value to the bowl and it is new again in a different sense. You will never forget the brokenness, the damage done to the bowl. The scars would remind everyone once brokenness of the bowl but gold filling into the cracks has repaired the bowl and it is being restored. So once you look into those scars, those cracks, one doesn’t see the cracks anymore because those gold lining now holds the bowl together.

Same goes with human beings. All of us have gone through this process either as a perpetrator or as a victim. We have either become instruments or victims of hatred, revenge, retaliation, anger, violence, abuse, gossip, character assassination, back stabbing and name tarnishing. List goes on and on. Grudges among families, communities, nations are often passed on from generation to generation. For example, family feuds go on for decades during which time members do not speak to each other. The cycle of hate, fear, and disunity continue. In our relationships, we have either become somebody who inflict pain upon somebody and someone who is hurt due someone else’s malicious and wicked word and actions. All this ends making us broken vessels, cracked bowls. We are battered and bruised. Never the same again. It is here we might have thought, how ugly my life is now. Yes! You are right because the consequences of hatred and anger are never attractive. However, your lives may look ugly if you stop there, your life may look ugly until and unless you don’t fill those gaps, those cracks with gold. That gold is God’s mercy.

Today in the Gospel, Jesus reminds us how benevolent his Abba Father is in pouring out grace from his treasure of mercy. When Peter asked Jesus how many times that he needs to forgive his brother or sister, Jesus challenges the human maths of Peter or rather human maths of society’s norm in forgiving people. Jesus teaches his disciples that we don’t deserve God’s infinite mercy but God pours it upon us in superabundance, without any measure. Because he looks into our fragile hearts. He sees not only who I am today with my brokenness and weakness but rather who I can be, who I could become. He provides this balm of mercy to both the perpetrator and the victim because there is no way both of them can have perfect peace if they haven’t experienced God’s mercy. So Jesus fills my cracks with God’s gold of mercy and makes me whole again. He could not do anythinhy else because that being merciful is his very nature, according to Pope Francis God’s other name is mercy.

The truth is, we can never become God’s heralds of mercy or carriers of God’s mercy, if we ourselves haven’t a recipient of mercy. If we truly open our hearts to God’s mercy, it touches the most profound place of gratefulness in our innermost being, it could evoke gratitude and humility. But if we keep our hearts closed to God’s mercy, it could result in shame and anger. This is what exactly happened to the servant whose debts king compassionately forgave. One who is forgiven could feel lesser before the forgiving one, if his or her heart is filled with ego and there is no room for God’s mercy.

Let us pray:

Merciful Father, to get forgiveness can be easy for us.  
We can feel great peace and joy,  
like walking out of jail.

Forgiving others

And embracing those who offend us is  
not so easy.

Jesus, please   
break the bonds that  
hold our refusal to forgive.

Give us your strength   
to take off our shackles.

Teach us to forgive   
in the way that your Son forgave us all on the cross.