

Mercy

The time of Lockdown has affected everyone.

Being advised not to go out, taking care not to come close to others or enter their homes, observing the strictest possible hygiene rules, all take their toll on our sense of well-being and emotional equilibrium.

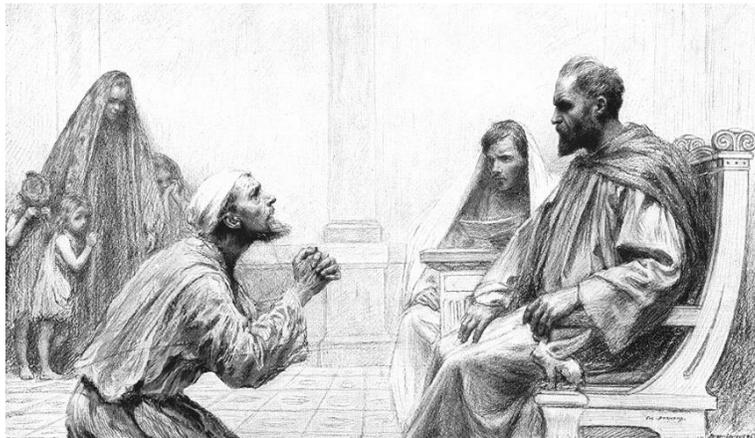
This year will in some way change us all.

For some the financial consequences have rapidly turned into a nightmare. Loans and mortgages require regular attention. When a person's income collapses through no fault of their own how are they to cope with mounting debt?

Basic fairness and justice suggests that banks and building societies should make allowances over repayment and give people help and time. Yet we recognise that in the end they will want their money, and with interest. We may not like it, but it is part of the hard reality of how money works.

It seems that the way human beings usually deal with each other, the best most of us can expect is for a person who cannot pay to be given time.

We hear an echo in this Sunday's Gospel.



A king decided to call in his debts. The servant, owing a vast amount, appealed for an extension of credit,

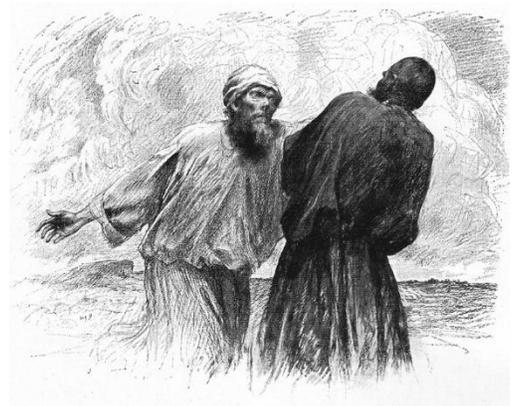
Give me time and I will pay the whole sum.

The response of the king to this appeal was more generous than expected. He did more than allow for a delayed payment. Feeling sorry for the servant, he cancelled the debt. This is mercy beyond everyday financial accommodation; not only was the king compassionate, he was generous.

The parable repeats the servant's appeal when he encounters another who owes him a small amount. Unsurprisingly, the other members of the household were outraged when no mercy was shown.

What if the first servant had told the second that he would allow him time to pay but that at some stage he wanted his money back?

We could understand such a reaction. Upset that he had faced ruin, perhaps because of the money he had lent out, would it not be reasonable to ask the second servant to start thinking about a delayed repayment scheme?



If he had done this it would not be so outrageous. It could be seen to fit with a human approach to justice and balance.



The generosity of the king went much further than negotiated and balanced behaviour. The telling of the story is to be seen as going beyond the world of money. It is about mercy and forgiveness.

The parable was prompted by Peter asking about how often forgiveness should be shown.

Human beings tend to forgive with certain provisos; if a person expresses sorrow, if they try to make amends, if they go out of their way to be nice to us.

It is extraordinary but Jesus did not tell Peter to make sorrow a condition.

If someone offends us seventy-seven times they do not just lack self-awareness or repentance; they could not care less.

Peter was not told to show a cautious mercy.

This highlights the difference between the way human beings show mercy and forgiveness, and how God treats us.

Our calling is to go beyond limited, human forgiveness and show the generosity of divine mercy.