

Rev. Derek Fairman

24<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time A

The philosopher Plato once wrote about a man who had been a good person all of his life. Then one day the man received a magical ring and this ring gave the man the power of invisibility. The man proceeded to commit various crimes, knowing that he would not be caught. Plato concluded that the man never really possessed virtue in the first place, doing good things because of fear of punishment. The man proceeded to commit evil once he had the opportunity of doing so without the threat of punishment. The appearance of virtue did not correspond to the interior disposition of his soul.

This account from the philosopher Plato might remind us of the Gospel that we hear today. The Lord teaches us this parable about forgiveness. He teaches us to forgive others as the Lord has forgiven us. This may not be easy, but if we want to truly understand what the Lord is teaching us, we must pay close attention to the parable. Yes, the Lord is teaching us about forgiveness, but we can learn something from studying the official.

Let's notice something about the official who was forgiven a great debt. When the king decides that the man should be sold along with his family in payment of the debt, the official begs that he be given more time, that the king be patient with him, so that the official can pay back the debt. Now, the reality is, this is an empty promise. The official has no way of paying back the debt because it's a very large amount. So, the king does not expect repayment.

The king is moved with pity and forgives the official his entire debt. The king did so because he realizes that the official did not want to be sold into slavery. Perhaps the king realizes what that would mean for the official and his family, or how the king would not want to fall into slavery himself, imagining what it might be like. In any event, the king is quite generous. The official only asked for more time, but the king went beyond that request to forgive the official his entire debt.

The official, however, is not generous. The official only wants to avoid slavery. The official does not care about his debt to the king, nor does he care about the king more than likely. If the official did care about the king, he would not have accumulated such a large debt, or at least would have tried to pay off the debt before. The official made an empty promise about paying back the king when he knew that he could not do so. We are not told that the official