

thanked the king for writing off his debt. Who knows? Perhaps the official went about laughing at the king, after he left his presence.

The official must look at the king as a fool. The king's pity is a source of weakness in the eyes of the official. The official thinks in terms of justice only and does not see the value of mercy. We can see this in the way that the official treats the servant. Clearly, the official does not value mercy, or else the official would have considered treating the servant with mercy. Since the official does not possess mercy or empathy, he cannot value the way in which the king treated him, and cannot do the same to his fellow servant.

No wonder the king becomes angry. The king could not have been angry because he was highly interested about this lesser case between the official and the other servant. The king becomes angry because the official mocks the mercy that the king had shown him. The official did not believe in the value of mercy and obviously shows ingratitude towards the king when he does not show mercy towards his fellow servant.

That is what is going on "behind the scenes" of this parable. What can this teach us about our relationship with God? How do we view God's mercy? We can respond to God's mercy in one of two ways. We can be grateful because we know that we do not deserve His mercy. We can thank Him for all that He does for us, because we know that He does not have to show us mercy; it is entirely out of His goodwill. If we value the Lord's mercy, then we will learn from His mercy towards us, because we will value mercy all the more.

On the other hand, we can be ungrateful; we can beg our way to God's mercy, while thinking that somehow, we deserve to be pardoned. Or we can realize that we do not deserve God's mercy but still think that He or anyone else who shows mercy is a fool. Everyone likes to receive mercy when it suits one's purpose. When our turn comes to show mercy, we can decide to rely on our own sense of justice and giving others what we think that they deserve. We can be pretentious, acting as if we really care about God and His ways but then turning back to other ways when the threat of His judgment has passed.

This parable teaches us to be grateful for God's mercy. This parable also teaches us something about mercy and compassion. We need to show compassion even when others do not. Sadly, there are many in this world that have no decency nor respect for anyone or anything. They would not hesitate to do us harm if they had the chance. Yet we must refrain from harming them, even though we are sure that we would receive no mercy from them. We must value

compassion and mercy even if others do not, because if we do not value mercy, who will? Ultimately the way that we value God's mercy will shape the way that we treat others.

When we hold grudges against others and refuse to forgive that person, we are making light of the mercy that God has shown to us. When we refuse to show mercy to another, we are taking matters of justice and retribution into our own hands. Ultimately, the anger and desire for vengeance will consume us and turn us into an angry and bitter person. The anger and desire for vengeance is like a poison, except that instead of turning it against the enemy, all it does is destroy the person in whom it dwells. In time, those feelings make us lose all sense of warmth and compassion. Those feelings can become a prism through which we see everything, warping the mind's sense of reality.

If we truly appreciate God's mercy, we realize that we cannot condemn anyone else. If the official had truly appreciated the mercy that the king showed to him, he would not have cared if the servant could not pay him immediately. He would have learned the importance of mercy from the king's example. We too, if we fully appreciate God's mercy by appreciating our own weaknesses and failings, can learn to forgive others. We cannot look condescendingly upon others when we have our own weaknesses to deal with. We may not appreciate the behavior of others, but if we appreciate the value of mercy, others must invoke not anger but compassion.

As we approach the altar today, we come before Him with faith in His ability to make things right. We come before Him with the hope that He will warm our hearts that have been made cold with injustice and other injuries. We want to grow in virtue and be free of anger and hurt, because it's in our best interest and everyone else's best interest. Yes, we can forgive others because we are told to. Wouldn't it be better to value forgiveness and practice it, not because we are told to, but because we have realized the depths of God's mercy?