

# Gospel Connection

SEPTEMBER 13, 2020: 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Year

**The parable of the unforgiving debtor: “You wicked servant! I forgave you your entire debt because you begged me to. Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant, as I had pity on you?”**

Matthew 18: 21-35

## **The once and future hoarder**

If you’ve been to a grocery store since March, chances are you had this experience, or something similar to it:

You were looking for a particular brand or product that the store just could not keep in stock: staples like milk, eggs, tuna fish, soap — and who will ever forget the Great Toilet Paper Crisis of 2020? Part of the problem was the supply chain could not keep up with the new demands of so many people suddenly being home all day — but a big part of the problem were the “hoarders”: people who stockpiled many of these staples, managing to snap them up as soon as clerks could re-stock the shelves.

So you complained — too loudly and angrily, perhaps — to the manager of the store. You went through the entire litany: how you have been a loyal customer of this store for years, that this pandemic has been difficult for you and your family, that it’s unfair that a few people should be able to snap up everything, etc. The manager listened politely and apologized profusely. Maybe he or she would save you a roll of TP or a dozen eggs.

Then, the next time you shopped, you found a product that had been out of stock for weeks. Your heart leapt for joy! Never could you imagine that hand sanitizer could be the cause of such elation; you grabbed the tomato soup as if you had found the Holy Grail. You resolved that you would not do without this again, so you filled your cart with as many cans or boxes or bags of the product as you could push.

Did it ever dawn on you that someone else would now do without because of your “stocking up”?

Or you may have experienced this: You’re at the bank to conduct some business and the customer ahead of you seems to be renegotiating the debt of a small European country; he or she has managed to tie up not just one but several tellers and an assistant manager while you and others wait. It’s finally your turn and, without realizing it, you take up more than your fair share of their time with One more thing, Before I forget, and As long as I’m here . . .

Or you’re looking for help at the hardware store or home center and you wait and wait while another customer has collared a clerk in search of the right nut and bolt. Finally — finally! — it’s your turn. And you found that you had more questions about your project than you thought — as other customers waited. You had become the kind of shopper you had complained about, the would-be do-it-yourselfer who needed more help than you realized.

It’s not much of a leap from being the forgiver to the forgiven. The servant’s cruel treatment of his fellow servant begins with his forgetting that he was once indebted and forgiven. Such forgiveness does not come easily: it requires overcoming our own anger and outrage at the hurt we have **suffered and re-focusing our concern, instead, on the person who wronged us; it means possessing the humility to face the hurt we have inflicted on others as a result of our insensitivity and self-centeredness. But only in such forgiving and seeking forgiveness are we able to realize the possibility of bringing healing and new life to a pained and grieving situation. Christ calls us to create within our families and communities that kind of environment in which forgiveness is joyfully offered and humbly but confidently sought. It begins by recognizing our own indebtedness, our own failings that divide and hurt — often without our realizing it.**