

## TO FORGIVE IS TO CROSS BARRIERS

*Matthew 18:21-19:1*

The biblical stories about the crossing of the Red Sea and of the River Jordan are stories that speak of barriers that needed to be overcome on the journey of the chosen people. We need to apply these stories to our own life journeys to help us overcome barriers we encounter in our lives. Perhaps one of the most difficult barriers to cross in life is the need to forgive our neighbour. Throughout life people will make you mad, disrespect you and treat you badly. Forgiving someone for what they said or did isn't always easy. This prompts Peter in today's Gospel to ask Jesus how often are we obliged to forgive? The Lord's simple answer, "seventy times seven times" is not meant literally. So he goes on to tell the story of the king who forgave a very serious debt. The implied question is, how are we unable to forgive the debts of a neighbour who owes us so much less? Without forgiveness life is governed by an endless cycle of resentment and retaliation. The underlying motive here is not "justice" but as we read in the story, the king was "moved with pity." I have always found that mercy bears richer fruits than strict justice. We are challenged by this parable to ask ourselves if others are allowed to appeal to our patience? Moreover, forgiveness isn't about approving what happened. It's choosing to rise above it. In this choice is hidden the major challenge to cross the "Red Sea" or the "River Jordan." In this parable forgiveness is not just an option, nor is it just about a higher sanctity; our eternal salvation depends on it: *"My Father will treat you in the same way, unless you forgive each other from your heart."* Even if forgiveness seems heroic let us be aware that it is in fact required!