

16th Sunday after Pentecost / September 13th
International Day & Homecoming

First Illumination: Genesis (50:15-21)

A thread of forgiveness stitches together the Track Two readings. We have recently seen Joseph's brothers arrive in Egypt as refugees from famine back home, while terrified that their now-powerful brother might take revenge for the way they had treated him. Now it is many years later. Their father Jacob, renamed as Israel, has died. And now they are worried again. Without their father's guarding hand, will Joseph turn on them? But Joseph, weeping, reassures them that just as God returns good for evil, so will Joseph forgive.

Psalm 103:1-13 Illumination:

This selection from Psalm 103 reflects an idea of forgiveness consistent with Joseph's response to his brothers: God forgives us, God heals us, God redeems us, God's love and mercy for us are steadfast. As a mother loves her children even when they misbehave, so God loves us and forgives us. God offers us compassion, not the punishment that our bad behavior might seem to deserve.

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Epistle Illumination: Romans (14:1-12)

Last week we heard Paul tell the Christians of Rome that Jesus's commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves is the greatest commandment: It includes all the other commandments within it. Now, as we conclude three months of readings through Romans, we hear Paul teach that loving our neighbors obliges us to not judge our neighbors. Don't be critical of our neighbors because they do things differently than we do, he exhorts his readers. Even if our neighbor makes us angry, he says, we are to forgive, standing together in giving glory to God, leaving judgement to God.

Gospel Illumination: Matthew (18:21-35)

Peter, perhaps thinking about Jesus's instructions in last week's Gospel about working out disagreements in the church, has an important question for Jesus: If someone keeps bothering me, just how many times do I have to forgive that person? Not just seven times, but 77 times, Jesus says, and we can be pretty sure that "77" really means "don't stop forgiving, period." Then Jesus tells of a slave who, after being forgiven his own crushing debt, cruelly refuses to forgive another slave's much smaller debt to him. The slave is punished, and we are left to remember how Jesus taught us to pray: "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us."

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