

Reflection for the Twenty Fourth Sunday of the Church's Year

“Ten thousand talents” is an awful lot of money. While it is not possible to be precise it is probably worth around £2.5 million at today's values. *“One hundred denarii”* is also a significant sum - £4,000 or £5,000 in today's money –a sum most of us couldn't afford to write off but certainly not in the same league. It seems absurd, even highly irresponsible, that the king should allow one of his servants to run up such a huge debt. But we must remember that this parable is a comparison of the kingdom of heaven and so the king is taking the place of God himself who is indeed lavish with his generosity. And we, like the servant in today's gospel, we have no means of repaying God for his lavishness. All that is expected of us is that we should treat each other with the same generosity with which God treats us. And that is the lesson which the servant in the gospel has failed to grasp. *“One hundred denarii”* (£4,000) is indeed a sum most of us couldn't afford to write off but, having just had a debt of *“ten thousand talents”* (£2.5 million) cancelled, the servant is challenged to find the same generosity in his own heart which he singularly fails to do.

The servant would have been well advised to heed the words of St Paul from last Sunday's reading: *“owe no-one anything, except to love each other”*.¹ He does indeed owe a great deal and it is not clear what became of this vast sum which he had borrowed; possibly squandered on the high life, badly invested or gambled away, we don't know. He certainly didn't deserve the generosity of the king who went much further than giving him time to repay the whole sum and *“released him and forgave him his debt”*. But he fails to grasp that he has exchanged a huge financial debt for the debt of mutual love and immediately, on his way out seizes upon a fellow servant, inflicting bodily harm upon him and demanding his dues. Yes, it's a significant sum but nothing like the sum he has just had cancelled. Having been the recipient of so much love and generosity he was surely bound to extend the same love and generosity to others.

Rather his heart is full of the *“abominations”* described in our first reading from the book of Sirach, full of *“anger and wrath”*. He *“seeks vengeance”*, and he shows *“no mercy towards someone like himself”*. How then can he *“seek for healing from the Lord”*? He hasn't a leg to stand on! And, in the words of today's first reading, *“the one who seeks vengeance will be paid vengeance from the Lord”*.

The message of the scriptures today is clear. Our hearts must not be filled with the *“abominations”* of *“anger and wrath”*, or *“seek vengeance”* or *“harbour anger”* or show *“no mercy”* but we must heed the words of Jesus to forgive our brother or sister from our heart.

¹ Rom 13:8