

Homily of Twenty Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A, 2026

Sirach 27:30-28:7; Psalm 103:1-4, 9-12; Romans 14:7-9; Matthew 18:21-35

Christianity is the most radical of all religions because of its teaching on forgiveness. No other religion has so much emphasis on forgiveness as in Christianity. Retaliation and revenge are clearly enshrined in the spirituality of some religions and many cultures, and deep in the way of life of many men and women. The first reading says, "Anger and wrath are hateful things, yet the sinner hugs them tight." The reading explains how forgiveness is important to our prayer life and our relationship with God: "Forgive your neighbor's injustice; then when you pray, your own sins will be forgiven. Could anyone nourish anger against another and expect healing from the Lord? Could anyone refuse mercy to another like himself; can he seek pardon for his own sins?" Jesus emphasizes this teaching on forgiveness in Mark 11:25-26, "And when you stand to pray, if you have anything against anyone, forgive, so that your heavenly Father may also forgive your sins." We pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us" (Matthew 6:12). The first reading admonishes us, "Remember the last days, set enmity aside; remember death and decay, and cease from sin!"

One of the lessons we can draw from today's gospel parable is that we sin against God every day but he does not treat us according to our sins. Today's Psalm says, "Who pardons all your iniquities, and heals all your ills. He redeems your life from destruction and crowns you with kindness and compassion. He will not always chide nor does he keep his wrath forever, not according to our sins does he deal with us, nor does he requite us according to our crimes. For as the heavens tower over the earth, so surpassing is his kindness towards those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he put our transgressions from us."

Yet, many times we are very unforgiving to one another, even over minor offenses. At the end of the Lord's Prayer Jesus cautions us, "If you forgive others their wrongdoings, your Father in heaven will also forgive yours. If you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive you either" (Matthew 6:14-15). St. James further warns us, "For the judgment is merciless to one who has not shown mercy" (James 2:12). This is repeating the message of the first reading.

However, we must not confuse justice with forgiveness. Justice aims to correct a wrong through lawful or restorative means. Justice aims to protect others and seek lawful accountability without being driven by hatred or a desire for revenge. Evil breeds and flourishes where there is no justice. To expect forgiveness in the middle of an on-going assault or aggression does not make sense. For forgiveness to be truly meaningful and for healing to occur, the aggression must first stop, regardless of whether there is an apology or justice. That is why we have the Defense Department and Law Maintenance and Law Enforcement Departments. That is why the Catholic Church Just War Doctrine defines the conditions under which force can be used to halt aggression and protect a victim or victims. We continue to pray for the repentance of those who inflict pain on others.

When an assault or an aggression is over (regardless of whether there is an apology or justice), forgiveness follows, and healing is possible. Forgiveness is a personal choice to let go of

bitterness, hatred, and the desire for personal revenge so that the victim can find inner peace. Deacon Ignatius Joseph says, "If you do not confess your sins, you keep your sins." In the same sense, if you do not forgive the sins against you, you keep them with you. That is to say, you keep the hurt, the pain, and the grief. Depending on the depth of the hurt, healing after forgiveness can be a gradual process. It requires prayer and patience.

Sometimes, we ask, "I have forgiven someone, yet I still remember the offense. Does it mean that I have not forgiven the person?" We must not underestimate the immense power of memory. Some experiences can remain in our memory for a very long, and sometimes forever. However, prayer, time, and goodwill can heal and erase the hurt, even if we still do remember the experience. When this happens, the offense may be remembered, but faintly.

We know that forgiveness and healing have taken place:

1. When the offense is no longer vivid in our mind. We have forgotten the details.
2. When we no longer make reference to the offense to support any kind of claim or reason for our actions.
3. When we are no longer upset when we remember the offense or the offender.
4. When we, in no way, wish to retaliate or wish misfortune to the offender.
5. When we treat the offender with acceptance, understanding, and kindness.
6. When we remember the offense, we are grateful for the lesson or lessons we learned from the experience.
7. When we remember the offense, we acknowledge that we have, also, offended other people many times and in many ways. We, also, are in need of forgiveness.

Let us conclude with words of St. Paul (Ephesians 4:32), "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." May God grant us the grace to reconcile, the grace to forgive, and the grace to be healed. Amen.

Fr. Martin Eke, MSP