

24TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, YEAR A,
SEPTEMBER 13,2020

FORGIVE AND YOU SHALL BE FORGIVEN.

Dear brothers and sisters, last Sunday's homily dwelled on giving fraternal correction and on winning our brothers and sisters back to Christ. This Sunday, we shall center on Forgiveness. Our Lord said, forgive not seven times but seventy-seven times.

Have you ever had the experience of being hurt or betrayed by a family member or someone you consider a bosom friend? Have you ever been cheated or brutally taken advantage of or rights denied? Have you ever been duped, robbed, raped or violated? Have you ever had the pain of someone beating up your dear mother or shooting your father or a child to death?

Most of us carry the heartache resulting from these or other harrowing experiences inflicted by others. The pain is worse when it is caused by someone you trusted. The Word of God expressed this, "If an enemy attacked me, I could hide from him but it was you, my other self, my comrade and friend, You, whose company I enjoyed, at whose side I walked in the house of God" (Psalm 55:14-15). In the

anticipation of the betrayal of Judas, our Lord evoked this Psalm, "Even my trusted friend, who ate my bread, has raised his heel against me" (Psalm 41:10, John 13:18). This was the experience of Caesar in Shakespeare when he was stabbed by his friend Brutus. Overwhelmed by the treachery of his trusted friend Caesar lost the morale to fight and he cried in despair, "*Et tu Brute?*

In the face of the hurts of life, where is the way to healing, the way to peace, the way to salvation? Is it in revenge? No. The way to healing, to peace and salvation is not in revenge, but in forgiveness. It may appear that once you avenge yourself, the balance is restored. But the contrary is true. Revenge begets more revenge and hurts. The Word of God says, "Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord. To the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:17-20). The first reading did not mince words on this score, "The vengeful will suffer the LORD's vengeance, for he remembers their sins in detail"

(Sirach 28:1). In the prayer he gave, Christ Jesus taught us to pray, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us" (Luke 11:4).

How many times should we forgive offences? The Lord said, "Seventy-seven times" (18:22). The Lord wants us to forgive without limit. He gave us an example of this in his prayers for those who had tortured, maltreated and crucified him. "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). Is it easy to forgive when you know that you were unjustly treated or falsely accused? No. It is not but it is possible and the only healthy option.

This is daunting - this outpouring of mercy cannot penetrate our hearts so long as we have not forgiven those who have trespassed against us. Love, like the Body of Christ, is indivisible. We cannot love the God we cannot see if we do not love the brother or sister we do see (1 Jn 4:20). In refusing to forgive our brothers and sisters, our hearts are closed and their hardness makes them impervious to the Father's merciful love. In confessing our sins, our hearts are opened to his grace (CCC 28400).

Holding grudges or resentments only hurts the one who holds them. In those moments when you are tempted to say, "I will never have anything to do with

this person again, resist that impulse. Think of how many times you have offended the Lord and he still forgives you. Remember your own sanity and forgiveness depends on how you forgive others. Do not hold on to past hurts, let go and let God in. Even after you have forgiven, you may still remember the hurt or feel it. What shall you do? "It is not in our power not to feel or to forget an offense; but the heart that offers itself to the Holy Spirit turns injury into compassion and purifies the memory in transforming the hurt into intercession" (CCC 2843).

An important aspect of forgiveness that is often hardest or completely neglected is the forgiveness of oneself. It is very important to remember that oneself is not excluded from the blessings and joy of forgiveness. The most salutary way to handle this is to go to Confession and give it over to the Lord with whom there is mercy and plenteous redemption.

"By Christ's will, the Church possesses the power to forgive the sins of the baptized and exercises it through bishops and priests normally in the sacrament of Penance" (CCC 986). If you find yourself still dwelling and mulling over and over an already confessed sin, then quit and seek the healing of memory. "Forgive your neighbor the wrong done to you; then when you pray, your own sins will be

forgiven" (Sirach 28:2).The neighbor in the case may include your very self.