

24th Sunday (A)

- As a priest, I have been privileged to witness the power of forgiveness working in the lives of many people.
- Just one that came to mind recently & particularly for its relevance to the assisted dying debate was that of an elderly gentleman I'd come close to, visiting him in a nursing home for about 2 years.
- He was easy to spend time with & I learnt a great deal from him about a whole range of topics; he was a wise, humble, intelligent & learned man – a widower, who was mentally very alert, but could no longer care for himself at home on his own.
- He often, proudly spoke of a son who was a journalist, & whom I'd come to meet, but lived in a different city with his family.
- He developed an aggressive cancer but was very unsettled & continued to linger in a painful dying - & just would not die.
- There seemed to be something on his mind & in his heart that disturbed him greatly.
- I learnt from his son that he had a brother who had fallen out with the family 20 years earlier & had left them, moving to northern Queensland, never to return.
- Before the days of the internet, with quite a deal of effort, I found him & I asked if he'd like to see his father before he died - he was open to do so.
- I met him at the Nursing home, introduced them to one another & left them for several hours.
- When I returned to see them, they had reconciled.
- The younger son had let down his guard & suspicions & seemed relaxed, & the old gentleman died the next day – gently in peace.
- In today's Gospel, Jesus tells us we should forgive each other 77 times.
- To number something as seven is to describe it as being perfect.
- When we hear Jesus use this phrase we recall the story in the Book of Genesis of the seven days of creation where, on the seventh day, God looks at the result of his creative love & sees that it is very good.
- Jesus says that not only is forgiveness good, but that it is a creative act that gives life to the world & gives glory to those who exercise it.
- In the 5th Century St. Augustine said that forgiveness was like a mother who has two wonderful daughters named justice & compassion, because forgiveness wasn't just a once-off event, but a process that involved & engaged other virtues as well.
- Jesus teaches a similar lesson in today's Gospel, where he uses the image of the King settling his debts.
- Because the King is just, compassionate & forgiving, he rightly expects that, in turn, his steward will be so as well.
- It can be easy to be forgiving in the big picture.

- We can preach strongly about war, peace & reconciliation & protest loudly & publicly to promote them.
- We can be disillusioned by the ways our national leaders fail to strive for peace & reconciliation between peoples & nations.
- It's quite another thing to forgive those closest to us; sometimes the hardest place to be compassionate & just is our own home & workplace.
- If we are not speaking to a husband, wife, child, parent, sibling, colleague or friend then today's Gospel poses a challenge for us right where we live.
- Part of the problem is that we could have accepted the motto from the film - 'Love Story' that says '*Love means never having to say you're sorry*'.
- This idea is many things, but it's not Christian.
- For followers of Jesus the exact opposite is true.
- We need to seek opportunities to forgive & ask for forgiveness.
- Jesus doesn't tell us that forgiveness is easy - just necessary.
- To forgive someone in our family, our workplace, our circle of friends or in our parish is not to pretend that a wrong or an injustice didn't occur, but it's about facing it head on & demanding justice with compassion.
- For when we stand before God with the weakness & sinfulness of our own life, God will not settle old scores, take revenge & exact retribution.
- Rather God will be perfectly just & completely compassionate.
- Forgiveness is the act of compassionately releasing the desire to pay back or punish someone, or yourself for an offence.
- There are no short cuts - it's not something you can force or pretend.
- Mistakenly, some under the guise of being "spiritual," have prematurely tried to forgive after someone emotionally knifes them in the gut.
- First, you must feel anger before you can begin to forgive.
- Revenge is the desire to get even when someone does you wrong.
- It's natural to feel angry, but revenge reduces you to your worst self, puts you on the same level with those spiteful people we claim to abhor.
- Our desire to transform anger is a summoning of peace, well worth the necessary soul-stretching.
- Forgiveness is a paradigm-shifting solution for transforming anger.
- It liberates you from the trap of endless revenge so that you can experience more joy, freedom & connection.
- Forgiveness does more for you than anyone else because it liberates you from negativity & lets you move forward.
- Forgiving might not make anger totally dissolve but it will give you the freedom of knowing you are so much more & capable of doing the seemingly impossible.
- When we choose forgiveness over revenge, & love over hate we begin to glimpse God's creative goodness working within us, because forgiveness is a participation in the very heart of God.