Homily for the 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time 2026 Year A

There is no mistaking the theme of today's readings, Mercy and Forgiveness. These are the basic virtues that every Christian must put into effect in their lives.

Apart from the command to love one another, there is no obligation which Christ taught more forcefully than that of showing forgiveness.

His last words on the cross were, 'Father forgive them.'

In the actual circumstances of every day life forgiveness is more talked about than put into practice, because it is difficult and demanding, and takes an awful lot out of us. Within families, a small incident can get blown completely out of proportion, and become a major flashpoint and great rifts can develop. Between neighbours disagreements can develop over simple things like the noise of children playing, or animals straying, or who has right of way. In a community a few thoughtless words, or some selfish action can trigger jealousy and provoke clashes.

As a people, we prefer to nurse old sores rather than reach out the hand of reconciliation.

The first reading advises us to stop hating and think upon the last things, especially death, because death is the great leveller and puts all human affairs into proper perspective.

If you walk along the tombstone paths of a Cemetery, forgiveness can take on a new dimension. Friends and neighbours who were with us not so long ago and maybe for a lifetime remained unrepentantly hostile over a boundary hedge are now buried cold and silent, a short distance from one another. There is no need of a fence between them now.

In the light of eternity and the shortness of our lifespan harbouring old grudges is pointless, and so much wasted energy.

That great cry of forgiveness on the cross, Christ lived out in deeds, the very purpose of His life and death was to win forgiveness for all peoples.

What comes through with blinding clarity in His teachings is that our ability to forgive is the measure of the depth of our Christianity. The forgiveness that we offer to others is

the indispensable condition which makes it possible for us to receive God's forgiveness in turn. If I cannot forgive how will I be forgiven?

We pray in the Our Father, 'Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us'. It is in pardoning that we ourselves are pardoned. Our failure to forgive and pardon means that we have forgotten God's goodness, or we have not fully appreciated the unconditional forgiveness that we have received from Him.

When I am hurt or offended it is my natural instinct to nurse and hang on to my wounds. Forgiveness might seem well nigh impossible. Or it can be seen as a sign of weakness if it is possible to forgive too easily.

It has to be said that forgiving and forgetting are not the same thing either.

There is nothing that I cannot forgive if I have the mind to, but there are some hurts and grievances that cannot be forgotten.

That is okay, that is nature's way of saying 'Be careful and don't let yourself be hurt like that again.'

Just be careful that the hurtful memory itself does not eat us up.

We are all different, but in each of our lives, there has to be a right and healthy time to let things go.

None of us is perfect. If you or I were to die tonight, and we were standing before God, we would need His forgiveness.

It is something to seriously think about. If there is something in my life that I will not forgive, then in Christ's own words, 'I in turn cannot be forgiven'.

One little afterthought, how very important it is to learn to forgive ourselves. We may have carried the heavy and painful burden of guilt around with us for years. But when we have finally confessed and received absolution, the memory of it still hurts us.

How difficult it is to learn to forgive ourselves, but when God forgives and God forgets then we have to learn to let go and gratefully accept God's mercy.

Remember Christ's words, 'Come to me all you who labour and are overburdened and I will give you rest for your souls'.