

## 24rd Sunday in Ordinary Time A (2026)

### *To err is human, to forgive divine*

The Gospel we have just heard highlights the importance of forgiveness in our Christian life and indeed in our human lives. It is so important, and there is much I could say about it. But just a few observations.

Firstly, I want to note that, as human beings, we are generally very forgiving. We do forgive most of the wrongs that are done to us by others, oftentimes though their thoughtlessness, carelessness, frailty, etc. And thank goodness this is the case. If we never forgave, we could not survive or move forward with our lives. Nations would engage in perpetual war, and so on.

But while we can forgive 99% of the wrongs done to us, we will at times encounter the 1% that we find truly unforgiveable. We are so hurt by something someone has done, we feel so betrayed, that we find we cannot forgive. We learn the truth of Alexander Pope's saying that that 'to err is human, to forgive divine'.

Yes, to err is human – we all make mistakes, we do or say things we later regret, or we fail to do or say things we should have. That's all part of being human. But to forgive! Sometimes we find it beyond our human powers. We recognise that forgiveness is something of God, and that it's only with God's grace that forgiveness can be possible.

Secondly, I believe that oftentimes the hardest person to forgive – and the one we need to forgive most of all – is our self. Self-forgiveness is very important. Jesus says that we must love our neighbour as our self. We cannot love another if we do not have a healthy self-love. If we are hard and unforgiving towards our self, we will probably be hard and unforgiving towards others as well. If we can forgive our self, we can also forgive others.

Self-forgiving is not self-excusing, or explaining away to myself the wrong I have done, saying to myself things like, 'it wasn't my fault, it was someone else's fault', etc. No, it is admitting, 'I did do wrong, and I am sorry. I will try to make it right as much as possible. With God's grace, I will try not to make the same mistake again.'

The third point I wish to make is that true forgiveness is often a process that will be realised over time. It's not something that can happen in an instant. We can say, 'I forgive you' but the next day find the feelings of hurt or resentment over what happened rising within us again. We realise that deep down we haven't forgiven anything. Sometimes we have to talk with the person we believe has wronged us and discuss, 'what steps do we both have to take to heal the damage that has happened.' At least some of these steps must happen before true forgiveness is possible.

Finally, I just want to say what I have said to you before – forgiveness cannot change the past, but it can make a future possible, and that is so important.

So today let us pray for the grace of forgiveness – of others and of our self. We pray for this grace for ourselves as individuals but also for nations and groups of people that they may find a way to put the conflicts of the past behind them and move forward in life-giving ways.

*Fr Michael Goonan SSP*