

September 17, 2017 – 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle A

Good Morning! How are you? Blessed indeed!

Today, the gospel and first reading of course talk about forgiveness. And I think I've talked about forgiveness more than most anything else. Because it's hard, huh? Look at how fast the man in the parable today goes from forgiven to being wicked. The reason he is called wicked by Almighty God was because he didn't forgive. And that can make all of us wicked. Who'd ever think about ourselves being wicked? But if we refuse to forgive we can become wicked. And so, and think about how often we hold our grudges and our unforgiveness, you know, you might have unforgiveness towards each other, you might have unforgiveness towards me, I'm might have it towards you, we might have it in our families, we might have in it in our neighbors, and this unforgiveness fills our life and destroys it. It destroys our community. It destroys our families. Forgiveness is that which opens up reconciliation and brings healing. But it's very, very hard.

If you've been coming to the ALPHA, I was most impressed, I've been a follower of Jesus now intimately for over 50 years and, yet, I still learned stuff. Right? It's amazing. Isn't it? Watching ALPHA, and you listen to the guy and it just gives it another way. And he talks about unforgiveness, you know, which is something that's been going around for lot. If unforgiveness is failing to forgive somebody is like taken drinking poison yourself and hoping the other person dies. It just doesn't work, right? When we have unforgiveness in our heart it destroys us. And he talked about a story about this Corrie ten Boom and I heard it before, but it really make an impact, and you've heard me for 16 years, and I want you to hear her. She was a woman that was captured and put into a prisoner of war camp with the Nazi's and this is from her book *I'm Still Learning to Forgive*. And listen to her because how often when we all struggle to forgive and listen to what she does:

*"I was in a church in Munich when I saw him." Some of you are going to get to go to Munich, in a church with me, in the spring so let's get excited. "And I saw this man and it was in 1947 I come from Holland defeated Germany with the message that God forgives. The solemn faces stared back at me and not quite daring to believe that God would forgive. There was never questions after a talk in Germany in 1947. People stood up in a silence collected their wraps and silence*

*left the room. And it was after this talk that I saw him working his way forward against the others.*

*One moment I saw the overcoat and the brown hat. The next the blue uniform and visor cap with its skull and crossbones. It came back with a rush. The huge room with its harsh overhead lights. The pathetic piles of dresses and shoes in the center of the floor. The shame of all of us walking naked in front of this man. I could see my little sister's frail form ahead of me. Ribs sharp beneath her parchment skin. Betsy and I, was arrested as children for concealing Jews in our home during a Nazi occupation in Holland. This man was one of our guards at Ravensbruck Concentration Camp where we were sent. Now, here was this man in front of me. And he put his hand out to me. A find message for a lying how good it is to know what you say that all our sins are at the bottom of the sea. I have who spoken so glibly about forgiveness fumbled in my pocket watch rather than take that hand. He would not remember me, of course, how could he remember one prisoner among a thousand women. But I remembered him and the leather crop swinging from his belt. I was face to face with one of my captors. My blood seems freeze.*

*You mentioned Ravensbruck in your talk he was saying. I was a guard there. No, he did not remember me. But since that time he went on I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven for the cruel things that I did there. But I would like to hear it from your lips as well, Fraulein. Again his hand came out to me. Will you forgive me? And I stood there. I, whose, sins again and again been forgiven by God and could not forgive. Betsy, my sister, died in that place. Could he erase her slow and terrible death simply by asking for forgiveness? It could have been many seconds that he stood there only seconds but I held out his hand, but it seemed to me like hours as I wrestle with the most difficult thing that I ever had to do. And I know that I had to do it. I knew it. The message that God forgives has a prior condition that we forgive those who've hurt us. If you do not forgive men their trespasses Jesus says neither will your Father forgive you, yours. I know it's not only a commandment of God but it's a daily experience. Since the end of the war I had a home in Holland for victims of Nazi brutality. Those who are able to forgive their former enemies were able to also return to the outside world and rebuild their lives. No matter what the physical scars. Those who nursed this bitterness remained invalids. It was simple and as horrible as that. And still I stood*

*there with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is not an emotion. I knew that too. Forgiveness is an act of the will. And that will can function regardless of how I feel. Help, I prayed silently. At least I can lift my hand. I can do that much. God, you supply the feeling. And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did an incredible thing took place. The current started down my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands and then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being. Bringing tears to my eyes.*

*I forgive you my brother with all my heart. For a long moment we grasp each other's hands the former guard and former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely as I did then."*

All of us, of course, have a choice. It's a choice to forgive. It's not a feeling. And we have to make that act of the will if we're not going to be called wicked by God. So, I want you, again, to sit there and think of anyone who has hurt you, and in your heart and say Jesus I forgive them, and I ask you to forgive them. Because remember when you and I continue with this Mass today right before we receive communion, we will say, The Lord's Prayer and we will say to Almighty God "forgive me, my trespasses as I forgive those who trespass against me." So we will tell God at this mass God if I forgive, then forgive me. If I will not forgive then do not forgive me. Let's be people who forgive.

May each of you know His love, today and forever. Amen.