

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Some injuries remain alive long after childhood ends. A dismissive comment from a parent, years of instability, favoritism, criticism, neglect, or the feeling that our needs never mattered can continue shaping adult relationships. We may have left the original home behind while still carrying an internal list of what others owe us. Forgiveness becomes difficult when the wounds helped form the way we learned to see ourselves.

The first reading gives a striking image: *“Wrath and anger are hateful things, yet the sinner hugs them tight”* (Sirach 27:30). Adult children may hold resentment because it feels like proof that what happened really mattered. Letting go can feel dangerously close to minimizing the past, excusing someone who never took responsibility, or betraying the younger part of us who deserved protection.

Sunday’s gospel helps us make an important distinction. Peter asks Jesus, *“Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him? As many as seven times?”* Jesus responds, *“I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times”* (Matthew 18:21–22). He then tells of a servant who receives tremendous mercy but refuses to extend mercy to another.

Forgiveness is not denial. It does not require us to call dysfunction normal, restore closeness with someone who remains harmful, or pretend that trust exists where it has never been built. Reconciliation requires participation from both people. Forgiveness can be an interior act of surrender even when the other person never apologizes, changes, or understands what they did.

For adult children, this matters because many of us learned to abandon ourselves in order to preserve relationships. Christian forgiveness is not another invitation to do

that. We can forgive and still say no. We can forgive and maintain distance. We can forgive while grieving what we did not receive. A boundary can remain necessary even as resentment begins to loosen.

Sometimes anger has served a purpose. It helped us recognize that something was wrong. It gave energy to establish distance or finally tell the truth. Recovery does not ask us to shame that anger. It asks whether we still need to organize our lives around it. What once helped us survive can eventually keep us attached to the past.

Saint Paul reminds us in the second reading, *“None of us lives for oneself, and no one dies for oneself”* (Romans 14:7). Unresolved wounds affect the relationships we have now. We may become guarded, easily threatened, controlling, or afraid of dependence without realizing how strongly the past is shaping the present. Forgiveness makes room for new responses.

This work may need to happen repeatedly. A family gathering, conversation, or memory can awaken an old injury with surprising force. We can acknowledge the pain without surrendering our present life to it. We do not have to choose between remembering truthfully and living freely. We bring it to God, talk honestly with safe people, and ask what belongs to us now rather than automatically returning to an old role.

Forgiveness also includes releasing ourselves from judgments formed in childhood. We may still carry beliefs that we were too sensitive, too needy, difficult, or responsible for problems we could not have controlled. God’s mercy invites us to loosen our grip on those accusations too.

Jesus does not ask us to forget our story. He invites us to stop allowing old wounds to define our identity and direct

our relationships. We can honor what happened, protect what needs protection, and still move toward freedom. Forgiveness does not erase the past. It loosens the past’s claim on the life God is giving us now.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What old resentment feels difficult to release because part of you fears that forgiveness would minimize what happened?

- How does a wound from your family of origin continue influencing the way you respond to relationships today?

- What might it look like to forgive while still honoring your story, maintaining necessary boundaries, and caring for the parts of you that were hurt?

MASS READINGS

FIRST READING Sirach 27:30—28:7

RESP. PS. Psalm 103:1–2, 3–4, 9–10, 11–12

SECOND READING Romans 14:7–9

GOSPEL Matthew 18:21–35