

In the second reading St Paul (Romans 14:7-9) tells us that 'the life and death of each of us has its influence on others'. So I would like to begin with two quotations from two people who certainly had an influence on me, and I am sure also on many others of a similar age to me.

Firstly a quote from the late President Nelson Mandela, one of the most inspiring figures of recent history.

'Forgiveness liberates the soul, it removes fear. That is why it is such a powerful weapon.'

Another great example of forgiveness was Pope John Paul II, and a quotation from him: 'Forgiveness is above all a personal choice, a decision of the heart to go against the natural instinct to pay back evil with evil.'

In today's Gospel reading (Matthew 18:21-35) Peter asks Jesus 'how often must I forgive my brother if he wrongs me?'. We know as Christians that we are called to forgive others, but we also know that this is sometimes very difficult.

I particularly like the quote from Nelson Mandela which speaks of forgiveness being a 'powerful weapon' In the First Reading (Ecclesiasticus 27:30-28:7) we are told that 'resentment and anger, these are foul things, and both are found with the sinner'. As sinners we can recognise resentment and anger in our lives, and we can recognise the way in which they can hurt and damage us more than any person we might be directing them at. Now we have to be careful because there is a 'good anger' that is directed against abuse and exploitation of the vulnerable which Our Lord himself expressed in the Gospels on more than one occasion. However there is also a 'bad anger' which doesn't come from God and which can lead us to be trapped in a cycle of resentment even when the matter that caused the original offence is no longer relevant. Hence the idea of forgiveness as the 'weapon' which will free us from that trap, which liberates the soul and removes fear.

The First Reading and the Gospel both talk about God's forgiveness to us and also our forgiveness directed to one another. The First Reading suggests that the forgiveness we will receive from God will depend on how we have forgiven others. However in the Gospel the master's forgiveness is entirely free and unconditional, the master only takes back his forgiveness when he realises that the servant has treated his fellow servant with no pity.

Each day we pray, 'forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us', but we pray with confidence because we know that we have been forgiven. The cross is the great weapon of forgiveness, that liberates our soul and removes all fear. It is from the cross that we hear the most important forgiveness quote: 'Father, forgive them they know not what they do' (Luke 23:34). When we do find it difficult to forgive then we need to look upon the cross and recognise that we are already the recipients of God's forgiveness. Then we can make that personal choice of the heart to go against any instinct to repay evil with evil, to become entangled in resentment and anger. It is only then that we will be able to forgive our brother or sister from our heart as Jesus has commanded us to do.

Link to video: <https://youtu.be/X6HSV-0C-bs>