7th Sunday in OT 2025

Captain Boyle, in Sean O’Casey’s play “Juno and the Paycock”, declared that “Th’ whole worl's in a terrible state o’ chassis”. Boyle’s statement seems particularly pertinent in today’s crisis-ridden world. Entire nations, and groups within nations, continue to intimidate and kill one another with irrational ferocity – a mentality which has been a too frequent feature of our own sad history! Some of today’s world leaders seem to think that all that is needed to settle world conflicts is a bit of common sense, and the ability to make a deal. If only it were that easy!

As we hear today’s Gospel passage, the simplicity of the words of Jesus ought to strike us; they are clear, direct, and memorable: *“do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who treat you badly…..be compassionate….do not judge…..do not condemn…..grant pardon”*. However, we must truthfully acknowledge that living in the manner indicated by Jesus, in reality, often rare enough! Is this not the situation, nationally and internationally, as well as within churches and Christian communities, and sadly too, within some families?

Following Jesus, in his way of forgiveness, is for all of us challenging. Reconciliation and forgiveness are far from easy. But we cannot expect forgiveness on a grand scale between peoples and races, if we fail to practise it on a small scale in our own lives. It is a fact that we all have something to forgive in others, perhaps much to forgive – it may be some resentment held against parents; perhaps a deep anger with a family member who has betrayed us; bitterness towards a boss, or work colleagues, who haven’t treated us as we think they should have; or a grudge held against a friend who let us down very badly.

When it comes to forgiveness, we often hold back, because forgiveness is generally difficult and costly, even on a small scale. With every hurt received comes the desire to settle the score – much time is spent ruminating on the hurt, poring over the details – that hurt, is like a wound unable to heal, because it is kept open by anger, hateful feelings, and self-pity.

Sean O'Casey, set his play, Juno and the Paycock, in the aftermath of the Easter Rising, and during the Irish Civil War, which was a particularly agonizing period in Irish history, when neighbour betrayed neighbour, and brother killed brother. In the play, the mother of a murdered son speaks these anguished words, “Sacred Heart of Jesus, take away our hearts of stone....and give us hearts of flesh...take away this murdering hate...and give us thine own eternal love.” A traditional prayer pleads, "Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make our hearts like unto thine". Today’s Gospel passage is not a list of dos and don’ts, but a call to pursue the ideal of Jesus, and to have that attitude of heart that “makes our hearts like unto thine”.

While Jesus’ critics were scandalised by the depth of his compassion and his readiness to forgive, the crowds were attracted to him because they saw in him the embodiment of the merciful God of whom he spoke. In Jesus, they encountered that “eternal love” which is nothing other than the extravagant love of his Father. He exclaims, “look at me, listen to me, and you see what God is like” – as he once said to the apostle, Philip, *“To have seen me is to have seen the Father” (John 14:9)*. But Jesus goes even beyond that and says, “be like God, *be compassionate….do not judge…..do not condemn…..grant pardon”* Imagine if we took Jesus more seriously, and allowed today’s Gospel to become a way of life, how different we would be, how different our society would be. It was once said, “see these Christians how they love one another”.

Jesus concludes today’s Gospel teaching with these thought-provoking words, *“the amount you measure out is the amount you will be given back”.* These words surely direct us to the Lord’s Prayer, and particularly to the petition, “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespasses against us”. Just as nothing shows more clearly God’s merciful love than his forgiveness of the sinner, nothing shows more clearly our love for others than our willingness to forgive from the heart. As we dare to say, “forgive us as we forgive others”, we are challenged to give personal testimony about our lived attitudes and actions. Forgiveness of others is the condition for receiving God’s forgiveness. Our forgiveness of others shows how far we have accepted God’s forgiveness and have let it change our lives.

St. Paul, writing to the Romans, said, “Do not model yourselves on the behaviour of the world around you, but let your behaviour change..... know what is good, what it is that God wants, what is the perfect thing to do. Do not let your love be a pretence, but sincerely prefer good to evil. Love each other..... and have a profound respect for each other” (Romans 12:2;10). **Amen.**