



Homily – 24th Week in Ordinary Time (A)ⁱ

*The Most Rev. José H. Gomez
Archbishop of Los Angeles*

*Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angeles
Los Angeles, California
September 11, 2011*

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Today our nation commemorates the tenth anniversary of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

For me, a moving moment in the crisis of 9/11 was when the rescue team discovered a huge steel cross-beam in all the ruin and rubble. I'm sure many of you remember the image: how they used a crane to pull this steel beam out of the wreckage and made it stand as a giant cross at Ground Zero.ⁱⁱ

Ten years later, this cross reminds us that Jesus Christ is with us always, even in the midst of the evil in the world and the suffering and difficulties in our lives.

So today in this Holy Mass, let us ask God to bring lasting good from out of this evil. Let us ask that he inspire in all the people of this great country, a new spirit of fellowship, reconciliation and common purpose.

In a special message that he sent to the Church in America for this anniversary of 9/11, our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI urges our country to make “a firm commitment to justice and a global culture of solidarity.”

He writes to us: “Every human life is precious in God’s sight and no effort should be spared in the attempt to promote throughout the world a genuine respect for the inalienable rights and dignity of individuals and peoples everywhere.”

The readings we have just heard in this holy Mass can help us in this effort to become a people of peace and reconciliation, a people who work to build a culture of mutual understanding and forgiveness.

We heard this morning in the Gospel the dramatic parable of the merciful King and the ungrateful servant. The lesson for us is that we need to be merciful with the people in our lives, as God has been merciful with us.

But we know it is hard to forgive others.

The first reading today, from the Book of Sirach, gives us a realistic profile of a person who has not yet learned to forgive. Sirach says the person who does not forgive “*embraces*” his anger and “*values* his wrath.”

So our readings today call us to examine our conscience. Do we forgive others from the heart, as Jesus asks us to? Or do we hold on to our little grudges and resentments?

Jesus knows our human nature. He knows that we find it easy to forgive ourselves or to overlook our own shortcomings. But we are a lot harder on other people. We expect mercy for ourselves. But often we don’t seem to act as if mercy is expected of us.

The point of Jesus’ parable is that we are all tempted in our weakness to be like that ungrateful servant.

Forgiveness is hard if we pay attention only to the other person and what he or she has done to hurt us. When that’s our emphasis, all we can think about is how much we’ve been “wronged” and what kind of “pay back” the person owes to us.

Now, in justice, when someone offends or does something to hurt us, we should expect that he or she will apologize and make things right. The servant in today’s parable certainly has every “right” to ask his fellow servant to repay the money that he has borrowed.

But what makes the servant wicked, is that he refuses to show any mercy when his fellow servant asks him for more time to repay the debt that he owes. Notice that his fellow servant uses the same exact words that he himself used in begging for the King’s mercy: “Have patience with me and I will pay you.”

My brothers and sisters, Jesus calls us to forgive sinners. But at the same time, he wants us to work with his grace to help repair the damage that is done by their sin — in our personal lives and in our society. He calls us to forgive those who do evil. But he also wants us to work in love to fight injustices in our world.

And our world needs to know a new spirit of forgiveness and mercy.

In the years since 9/11, our country seems less unified and more divided. Our culture and our politics seem more angry and judgmental. People seem so quick to condemn.

We seem like we are less able to empathize with others, and less concerned to understand one another’s differences. We seem more unforgiving of those who have done something wrong.

Blessed John Paul II once wrote: “Forgiveness demonstrates the presence in the world of the love that is more powerful than sin. . . . A world from which forgiveness was eliminated would be nothing but a world of cold and unfeeling justice, in the name of

which each person would claim his or her own rights. ... [Without forgiveness] the various kinds of selfishness latent in man would transform life into a system of oppression of the weak by the strong, or into an arena of permanent strife between one group and another.”ⁱⁱⁱ

We have to challenge those tendencies in our society today.

And we do that through our own personal witness to our Lord Jesus Christ’s mercy in our lives.

We have to pray for an increase in our awareness of what St. Paul talks about in today’s second reading when he says: “None of us lives for himself.”

We owe our life to Jesus Christ, my brothers and sisters! What a great gift he gives to us, in offering his life for us on the cross. Through his sacrifice, he has forgiven us all our trespasses!^{iv}

So we need to keep our focus on Jesus Christ. We need to live with humble and joyful gratitude for the mercy that he has shown us.

We need to live according to the prayer that Jesus taught us — “*Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.*”^v

This is a beautiful way to live, my brothers and sisters! If we forgive others as the Lord has forgiven us,^{vi} then will be preparing the way for a new kind of culture and society.

So this week, let’s try to begin by practicing forgiveness with those people in our lives who maybe we find hard to forgive or hard to tolerate.

We can start by just smiling at them or greeting them in a cheerful way. We can pray for them, using the words that Jesus used to pray for his persecutors: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”^{vii}

Let’s also try to be more frequent in going to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The more we confess our sins, the more sensitive we become to our own need for God’s mercy. And the more sensitive we become to our need for mercy, the more we will grow in our willingness to forgive others.

So on this day when we remember 9/11, let us ask Mary, the Queen of Peace, to help us be more dedicated to her Son’s Gospel of mercy and reconciliation.

ⁱ Readings: Sir. 27:30–28:7; Ps. 103:1–4, 9–12; Rom. 14:7–9; Matt. 18:21–35.

ⁱⁱ Kevin J. Jones, “World Trade Center cross still consoles victims, priest says,” *Catholic News Agency* (Sept. 10, 2011); Sally Jenkins, “A long-standing message of loss and hope,” *Washington Post* (Sept. 9, 2011), A1.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Dives in Misericordia*, 14.

^{iv} Col. 2:13.

^v Matt. 6:12.

^{vi} Col. 3:13.

^{vii} Luke 23:34.