

Homily for 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

It is called “The Forgiveness Project.” It is a website that deals with forgiveness. One story after another is a record of the journey of forgiveness in people’s lives.

There is the story of Andrew Rice whose brother, David, was killed when the World Trade Center was attacked. Andrew has dedicated himself to trying to understand the underlying causes of violence. He is a member of Peaceful Tomorrows, a group founded by family members of September 11 victims seeking effective non-violent responses to terrorism. As a recovering alcoholic, he had come to understand that everyone has the capacity for good and the potential for bad in them. By committing himself to finding the good in order to overcome the bad, he became a living witness to the power of forgiveness.

Then there is the story of Anne Gallagher whose brother, a former IRA member, was shot dead by an unknown gunman. She founded Seeds of Hope which works to bring healing where hatred existed. She writes: “Forgiveness is a journey. Today you can forgive and tomorrow you can feel the pain all over again.”

What you learn from this website is that forgiveness is not easy. In fact, forgiveness is a challenge...a challenge that is met in different

ways by different people. And forgiveness goes to the heart of the Word of God that we have heard today.

These readings are about our relationship with other people. Ezekiel speaks of forgiving the evil in others so that they might change the direction of their lives. St. Paul speaks of the healing power of love that is the essence of forgiveness. Jesus encourages us to mend our relationships...to forgive each other rather than alienate ourselves from each other.

How often are we separated by suspicions, arguments, hurt feelings, disagreements, bad judgments, over reactions and a compulsion to take care of oneself before anyone else? How many times have we harbored grudges and refused to forgive another for the hurt they have caused us? The longer we let those feelings fester, the deeper the division, the more profound the hurt...the more the need for forgiveness.

But we should not be naïve. Forgiveness is not just a comfortable word that is easily spoken. Forgiveness means that we must grapple with our personal feelings and discover that in order to make right our relationship with others we need God's help. On our own, forgiveness is often impossible. With the grace of God forgiveness can become a reality. This is why we come to the Eucharist each week. For by the grace of God we discover God's forgiveness in our own lives and

pray for the courage to bring that forgiveness to others. This is how we live the Gospel. This is how we build a better world.

I sometimes think that at the end of our lives all our accomplishments and all our achievements will mean nothing if we have failed to love each other and, more importantly, made that love real in the forgiveness we bring to each other.