

“The Two Envelopes”

A priest once shared this story from his early ministry.

A woman came to see him, furious with her sister. They hadn’t spoken in years. Every attempt at reconciliation had collapsed into old accusations.

The priest listened, then asked her to do something unusual.

He handed her **two envelopes**.

On the first he wrote: **“What she owes me.”**

On the second: **“What God has forgiven me.”**

He asked her to go home, pray Psalm 103, and fill them out honestly.

She returned a week later.

The first envelope contained a list of real hurts: betrayal, harsh words, broken trust.

The second envelope contained only one sentence: **“More than I can ever repay.”**

She said, “Father, when I wrote the first list, I felt justified. But when I wrote the second... I couldn’t hold the first one anymore.”

She didn’t reconcile with her sister overnight. But she began to pray for her. She stopped rehearsing the injury. She stopped letting the debt define her.

Months later, the sisters spoke again for the first time. The relationship wasn’t perfect, but the bitterness was gone.

She told the priest, “I didn’t forgive because she deserved it. I forgave because I finally remembered what God has done for me.”

The readings press one truth with unusual force: **forgiveness is not optional for the Christian — it is the shape of our life in Christ**. We forgive not because it is easy, nor because the other deserves it, but because *we belong to the Lord who has forgiven us first*.

1. The human struggle: resentment is real

Sirach names the things we prefer not to admit: *anger, wrath, resentment*. They cling to the human heart. They feel justified. They feel protective. They feel like armour.

But Sirach warns: **“The sinner holds on to them.”** Not the wounded person — the *sinner*. The one who clings to anger becomes trapped by it.

Sirach’s command is blunt: **“Forgive your neighbour the wrong done to you; then your sins will be forgiven when you pray.”**

This is not moralism. It is spiritual realism. **A heart filled with resentment cannot receive mercy**. Not because God refuses, but because resentment closes the door from the inside.

2. Psalm 103: God’s character shapes ours

Psalm 103 gives the antidote: “The Lord is **merciful and gracious**, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love.”

This is the God we belong to. This is the God who has dealt with *our* sins. This is the God who “does not repay us according to our faults.”

The psalm is not just describing God — it is describing the **pattern** into which God is forming us.

If we are His children, then our hearts must begin to resemble His.

3. Romans 14: We belong to the Lord

St. Paul gives the theological foundation: “None of us lives for oneself... whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s.”

This is the key. Forgiveness is not primarily about the other person. It is about **who we are**.

We forgive because our life is not our own. We forgive because Christ has claimed us. We forgive because He died and rose *for us* — and for the one who hurt us.

If I belong to Christ, then my grudges cannot own me.

4. The Gospel: Peter’s question and Jesus’ answer

Peter asks the question we all ask: “How many times must I forgive? Seven times?”

He is being generous. He is offering more than the law required.

Jesus replies: “Not seven times, but seventy-seven times.”

In other words: **stop counting**. Forgiveness is not a quota — it is a way of life.

Then Jesus tells the parable of the unforgiving servant. It is deliberately exaggerated:

- The servant owes a debt he could never repay — millions of dollars in today's terms.
- The king forgives everything.
- That same servant refuses to forgive a tiny debt — a few dollars.

The point is unmistakable: **We forgive because God has forgiven us a debt we could never repay.**

The parable is not about mathematics. It is about **memory**. The unforgiving servant forgot the mercy he had received.

Christ is warning us: When we forget God's mercy, we become harsh, small, and closed-hearted.

5. What forgiveness is — and what it is not

Forgiveness is not pretending the hurt didn't happen. It is not excusing injustice. It is not allowing abuse to continue. It is not instant reconciliation.

Forgiveness is **handing the debt over to God**. It is refusing to let the injury define your future. It is choosing freedom over bitterness. It is saying: *"Lord, I release this person from owing me anything. You deal with them. Heal me."*

Forgiveness is not weakness. It is the strength of Christ crucified.

6. A pastoral word for our parish

We carry real wounds:

- family conflicts
- old parish hurts
- broken friendships
- disappointments
- misunderstandings
- things said in anger
- things left unsaid

Christ is inviting us today to begin again.

Not with a dramatic gesture. Not with a perfect solution. But with a simple prayer:

"Lord, I choose to forgive. Help my heart follow."

Forgiveness is often a process. But the grace begins the moment we say yes.

7. The Eucharist: where forgiveness becomes real

Every Mass is the place where mercy is given and learned.

Here Christ shows us the cost of forgiveness — His Body broken, His Blood poured out.

Here He gives us the strength to forgive — because He lives in us.

Here He reminds us: **We are the forgiven ones. We are the people of mercy. We are the disciples who stop counting.**

Conclusion

The readings call us to a freedom only Christ can give. Let us ask for the grace to forgive as we have been forgiven — so that our hearts may resemble the heart of the Lord who is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love."