



SUNDAY 13 SEPTEMBER 2026

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

The Parishes of: Bishop Auckland || Newton Aycliffe & Shildon || Willington
Crook, Tow Law & Wolsingham || Tudhoe || Coundon, Ferryhill & Windlestone

ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

4th Sunday of the Year (A) - Matthew 18: 21 -35

On 8th November 1987, Remembrance Sunday, a Provisional IRA bomb was detonated near the war memorial in Enniskillen in County Fermanagh, Northern Ireland. Twelve people were killed and over sixty were injured. Gordon Wilson and his twenty year old daughter, Marie, were trapped together under the rubble. Marie died holding her father's hand and telling him she loved him.

Gordon was interviewed by the BBC hours after being pulled from the rubble, and in the interview he said he bore no ill will or grudge and forgave the killers. It is said that his message prevented retaliatory violence from loyalist paramilitaries. Gordon later became a dedicated peace campaigner and an Irish Senator. He died in 1995.

Stories like this, spawn conversations and arguments. Gordon Wilson's actions amaze and challenge most of us. We speak about wars and peace, we can speak about reconciliation, but today's Gospel probes our understanding and capacity for genuine forgiveness. Simon Peter's big-hearted suggestion that he/we should forgive seven times (seven being regarded as the perfect number) was blown away by Jesus multiplying that at least ten-fold. God's forgiveness of us is the yardstick here.

Peter's question occasions one of Jesus' famous stories. This parable of the unforgiving servant is brilliant. The man has an impossible debt to pay. He's also someone who does not understand kindness, generosity and fabulous mercy. The movement of the story engages our feelings; we might readily be horrified and take sides. But the villain of the piece is ourselves – me, you, all of us. God has forgiven and serially forgives each of us. We are literally always indebted to him. If we get this, do we in our turn, show or withhold forgiveness in our relationships, in our own home and elsewhere?

St Augustine once said that Forgiveness is a mother with two daughters, Justice and Compassion. It's an ongoing process, and for most of us, rarely a smooth one. For some, a mountain seemingly impossible to climb. Jesus' parable here pulls us into giving thought about where we are in really forgiving, and do we ask forgiveness of those we have offended? Jesus doesn't tell us it's easy, just necessary.

Because when we stand before God in our weakness and the sins of our life, God won't settle old scores, take revenge or exact retribution, but will be perfectly just and completely compassionate. When we choose forgiveness over revenge, love over hate, God's goodness is leaking out from us. Forgiveness is sharing in the heart of God. I still find it a challenge to pray... "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us". It makes me stop and think.



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More from Pope Leo on the necessity of caring for the poor

Christian holiness often flourishes in the most forgotten and wounded places of humanity. The poorest of the poor – those who lack not only material goods but also a voice and the recognition of their dignity – have a special place in God's heart. They are the beloved of the Gospel, the heirs to the Kingdom (cf. Luke 6:20). It is in them that Christ continues to suffer and rise again. It is in them that the Church rediscovers her call to show her most authentic self.

St Teresa of Calcutta, canonised in 2016, has become a universal icon of charity lived to the fullest extent in favour of the most destitute, those discarded by society. Foundress of the Missionaries of Charity, she dedicated her life to the dying abandoned on the streets of India. She gathered the rejected, washed their wounds and accompanied them to the moment of death with the tenderness of prayer. Her love for the poorest of the poor meant that she did not only take care of their material needs, but also proclaimed the good news of the Gospel to them: "We are wanting to proclaim the good news to the poor that God loves them, that we love them, that they are somebody to us, that they too have been created by the same loving hand of God, to love and to be loved. Our poor people are great people, are very lovable people, they do not need our pity and sympathy, they need our understanding love. They need our respect; they need that we treat them with dignity." All this came from a deep spirituality that saw service to the poorest as the fruit of prayer and love, the source of true peace, as Pope John Paul II reminded the pilgrims who came to Rome for her beatification: "Where did Mother Teresa find the strength to place herself completely at the service of others? She found it in prayer and in the silent contemplation of Jesus Christ, his Holy Face, his Sacred Heart. She herself said as much: 'The fruit of silence is prayer; the fruit of prayer is faith; the fruit of faith is love; the fruit of love is service.' It was prayer that filled her heart with Christ's own peace and enabled her to radiate that peace to others." Teresa did not consider herself a philanthropist or an activist, but a bride of Christ crucified, serving with total love her suffering brothers and sisters.

Dilexi Te paras 76 and 77