

HOMILY 24TH Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 13, 2026

When I was practicing law, I handled medical malpractice defense cases representing the hospital's interest. Many of the big cases involved wrongful death actions. I think sometimes people felt that if they got a big settlement or a big verdict that they would have closure and a sense of peace, but the settlements or verdicts were never big enough. And Friday was the anniversary of 9-11. Two of the men responsible have been in prison since then and have never gone to trial. They both confessed but the confessions have been found to be inadmissible in court and because of a variety of legal reasons, they have not gone to trial. The news media interviewed several people who lost loved ones during 9-11, and they said that they are waiting for a verdict in the trial to get closure and a sense of peace. My guess is that if they go to trial and get a guilty verdict and the death penalty, they still will not get closure or a sense of peace from that alone. People do need to be held responsible for their actions. These civil and criminal legal proceedings are a necessary part of our system of government; in themselves they will not bring closure or a sense of peace. They cannot have what they really want, to have their loved one back. There will never be enough money or a severe enough verdict to compensate for the loss of their loved one.

In the Gospel reading Jesus tells us that we must forgive all of the time, and he tells us a parable. If you only look at the second part of the parable, it would seem reasonable. A debtor borrows a small amount of money, he does not pay it back, and the lender demands payment. Well, that seems just, that seems fair. It is the first part of the parable that makes his action seem unjustified. The lender just had a huge debt forgiven and he will not show the same mercy to his debtor. It is the first part of the parable that makes the second part seem unreasonable, but should it?

It is very hard to forgive. It is easy to say but it is hard to do. When someone does something to hurt you, you must forgive the debt. The debt cannot be repaid because we cannot change the past. If someone says something slanderous about you, it is out there.

They cannot take it back. If someone you love steals money from you even if they give the money back, there is still the hurt that someone you love stole from you. You must forgive. Forgiveness does not mean what they did was ok. Forgiveness does not mean that you should pretend that it never happened. It does not mean that you must forget. It does not mean that you must allow them to continue to hurt you. It means that you must let go of the anger and the inclination to get even. If you cannot do that you are going to let something that happened in the past control your future. You will also in some ways become a bitter, unhappy person. I have had people tell me, “Fr. Jim, do you expect me to just let them get away with it?” Well, they already have. Many times, the person that hurts you has gone on with their life, and you are still stuck there.

Forgiveness is hard. It is a process. The process has nothing to do with the person that hurts you. They cannot pay the debt; they cannot change the past. An apology may help, but it is not necessary and it may never come. If you are working on forgiving someone, some days you will think that you have forgiven and then suddenly the anger comes right back. You just have to keep working on it. If it involves a big loss, like the wrongful death actions and the criminal actions, or the loss of a relationship, you must first grieve the loss. You cannot expect the legal system or another person to do this for you.

If you are trying to forgive someone, I have a couple of suggestions. You must stop ruminating about it. You may need to sit with it for a little while, replay it and learn from it, and then stop doing that. Every time you ruminate about it and replay it, you will bring all those old feelings back into the present. It just makes it harder to let go of the anger. When you find yourself doing that try and stop yourself. The second thing I would suggest you do is pray for the person who hurt you. It is difficult to stay angry with someone you are praying for. And when you bring them to the Lord in prayer, he will help you to heal.

When you are hurt if you want to get closure and a sense of peace you must forgive, 70 times 7 as Jesus taught us. It is difficult, but it is the gift you can give yourself. No one wants to walk around with all that anger.