

**14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity 13<sup>th</sup> September 2020**  
**Romans 14:1-12 and Matthew 18:21-35**

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer *Psalms 19:14*

From your heart! Three small words but what power they contain. Consider for a moment...what is in your heart right now?

I know the answer to this question for mine so I daily say, from Psalm 51: Create in me a clean heart, O God and put a new and right spirit within me'.

As we heard, St Paul's words to the Roman Church encouraged people to act 'from your heart'. It does not matter, Paul said, what opinions you have; whether you eat everything or just vegetables, love one day or all days, whether you fast or you eat. What matters is doing what you do and giving thanks to God 'from your heart'. Stopping to comment on someone who honours God in a different way from yourself is not honouring God or God's gifts of grace and love.

In today's Gospel, Peter appears to separate himself from the rest of the group and individually ask Jesus how many times he needed to forgive. Imagine the scene...what in Peter's heart led him to ask this

question? Was it one of his closest friends he needed to forgive, I wonder...

Peter is the disciple Matthew portrays as asking those really hard questions, interestingly, those we still ask today. Peter asked Jesus if he should forgive seven times; seven was understood as the heavenly, perfect number. No, says Jesus, not 7 but 77, some texts read 70x7! Imagine the look on Peter's face!

Forgiveness is not something commonly achievable. Our hearts are not quite BIG enough. Maybe Peter took Jesus to one side so the others wouldn't hear how small his heart was. It's easy to **say**, 'I forgive you', but there is an inner truth. The parable Jesus told visually, and vividly, explains this truth. Deep down, we know the parable is true.

During a Reader Conference on IOW 3-years ago, Mark Russell, Church Army Captain, now CEO of The Children's Society, recounted events in High Green, Sheffield, on 30<sup>th</sup> December 2012. Church organist Alan Greaves was walking to St. Saviour's Church for Midnight Mass. He was attacked by two youths and died from horrific injuries. Listening to this my heart went into shock as I visualised two despicable youths, high on alcohol and drugs, acting without thought or self-knowledge.... as you do. But, as the story unravelled, my heart was challenged as I heard about the cost of forgiveness 70x 7 times.

The court case took place July 2013. Apparently, police attend final hearings when sentences are handed down as violence often erupts. Alan's wife had asked that no police attend because she knew there would be no violence. She had communicated with the parents of the accused and watched them throughout proceedings; she understood they were also grieving... for their sons.

How could a murdered man's wife do this? She did it because forgiveness came 'from her heart'. Maureen Greaves, an evangelist with the Church Army, sat with her husband, knowing he was going to die, "I held Alan's hand and I said to God, 'Please take the men who have murdered Alan. I want to place them into your hands. I want you to deal with them and I want you to give me the grace to truly forgive them'. After the verdict she said, "It is truly through the grace of God, the love of God, that I have been able to forgive these people - to forgive Ashley and Jonathan - and to leave them in God's hands, and to continue to do just what I have committed myself to do," in seeking justice, not vengeance.

Earlier, I said it was not commonly possible to forgive, now I say it is possible and 'from the heart' but only through God's grace and mercy. People can leave unspeakable acts in God's hands, at the feet of the One overflowing with mercy and love. Let's not forget this as we celebrate Jesus' death and resurrection today and Holy Cross Day tomorrow [14<sup>th</sup> September].

From your heart! Three small words but what power they contain. Consider for a moment...what is in your heart right now?

*Strike the rock of our hard hearts, O God, and let our tears of joy and sorrow mould us to bear the imprint of your love, given in Christ Jesus, our risen Lord. Amen.*