

## 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 13, 2020

The inscription on a tee shirt in a seaside tourist shop window read: "To err is human – to forgive is out of the question!" It's funny but sad at the same time because it's probably how many otherwise good people feel about forgiveness. The actual proverb says, "to err is human, to forgive is divine," and that really captures the wisdom and teaching in today's scripture. Mistakes, failures, and sins, intended and unintended, are part of being human. Forgiveness, mercy, and compassion are part of being God. It's human nature to make mistakes. It's God's nature to forgive. And according to both Sirach and Jesus, God wants us to forgive each other as a way of life. In the Lord's prayer, Jesus made it a dangerous proposition "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

With that in mind, listen again to the questions in our first reading. "Could anyone nourish anger against another and expect healing from the Lord? Could anyone refuse mercy to another like himself and then seek pardon for his own sins?" Sirach expected everyone to answer, "of course not." Yet it's hard for us to let go of the idea that we are always justified in our non-forgiveness of others while fully expecting God to forgive us.

In 1984, Bruce Goodrich, 20 years old, was being initiated into the cadet corps at Texas A&M University. One night Bruce was forced to run until he dropped, which he did, but he never got up. Bruce Goodrich died in a hazing accident before he even entered college. A short time after the tragedy, Bruce's father wrote this letter to the administration, faculty, student body, and the corps of cadets.

"I would like to take this opportunity to express the appreciation of my family for the great outpouring of concern and sympathy from Texas A&M University and the college community over the loss of our son Bruce. We were deeply touched by the tribute paid to him in the battalion. We were particularly pleased to note that his Christian witness did not go unnoticed during his brief time on campus. I hope it will be some comfort to know that we harbor no ill will in the matter. We know our God makes no mistakes. Bruce had an appointment with his Lord and is now secure in his heavenly home. When the question is asked, 'Why did this happen?' perhaps one answer will be, 'So that many will consider where they will spend eternity.'"

Sirach said, "Remember your last days, set enmity aside, cease from sin and overlook faults." Of all the ways Bruce's father could have handled the tragic death of his son, he chose the one that most reflected the God of Mercy and forgiveness. Jesus encourages us to do the same.

**Fr. Valentine**

Scripture Readings: <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/091320.cfm>