

September 13, 2026—24th Sunday

In about 10 days, we will celebrate the Beatification Mass of Archbishop Fulton Sheen here in St. Louis. His whole life was thoroughly investigated and a miracle granted by God through his intercession was verified. His writings were examined and people who knew him were questioned; to be beatified the Venerable Sheen had to exhibit, not just ordinary virtue, but extraordinary virtue.

One of Fulton Sheen's many jobs was to head the mission office centered in New York. It was after WWII and many Catholic schools, churches and hospitals needed to be built. The Cardinal archbishop of New York tried to get Fulton Sheen to give him a large donation of money from the mission office to continue his building program. Sheen refused, saying that the money had been donated for mission work to the poor and he couldn't hand it over. The dispute went all the way to the pope who sided with Sheen. The Cardinal was embarrassed. From that time on he never had a good word to say about Sheen, and Sheen never had a bad word to say about the Cardinal; he didn't even mention it in his autobiography. It was the greatest suffering of his life, and he bore it with great virtue.

If only we could learn to bear the offenses and hurts that others cause us like Sheen. Sirach told us in the First Reading, **“wrath and anger are hateful things, yet the sinner hugs them tight.”** What a vivid image! We tend to hold on to every slight and hurt and injustice; we don't want to let them go. We don't quite believe the words of Jesus: **“Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven”** (Matt. 5:11-12). Our first reaction is to get back at others, either through angry words and actions or to turn the anger inwards by feeling sorry for ourselves. We don't forgive easily and often nurture the hurt in our heart.

Most of the time, when we feel hurt by another, they don't even realize it. We can hold onto anger and hurt for years and if we told them about it, they wouldn't even know what we are talking about. They go about their merry lives not even noticing how they affect others; we do the same thing. Sirach gives good advice to the people of the Old Testament: **“Can anyone nourish anger against another and expect healing from the Lord? . . . Think of the commandments, hate not your neighbor; remember the Most High's covenant and overlook faults.”**

As Christians, we have an even greater reason to forgive. Jesus makes this point in the parable of this Sunday's Gospel. It involves two men who owe money to

others. The first owes a huge amount to the king and is brought in for judgement. The amount has been estimated to take half of one's lifetime to pay back. In other words, it was an impossible debt to repay. The amazing thing is that the king writes off the whole debt when his servant pleads for mercy. He is most merciful and forgiving. The king stands for God who is most merciful toward us. We could never pay back the debt of sin that we owe because our offenses are against an infinite God. It takes the infinite God to pay back an infinite offense. At the same time, it is mankind that offended God, so it would take Jesus Christ, true God and true man, to make reparation with divine power for humanity. **"For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him"** (John 3:16-17). As Christians, we have received a depth of forgiveness that we could never earn or repay.

The parable continues with the servant, newly forgiven, with a great weight lifted off him, encountering a fellow servant who owed him a much smaller debt. It would only have taken 100 days' wages to pay him back. He pleads in the same way, but the newly forgiven servant will hear none of it. How often are we like this? We pray, often enough, **"forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us"**. Yet we are too often like the ungrateful servant in the parable.

You hear people say "forgive and forget" but we just can't delete a memory like we delete information on a computer. The key is to make an act of forgiveness and when the emotions bring up the feelings all over again, we must not ponder them but turn to God with a short prayer and get our minds on something good. Like a wound on the body, sometimes it heals on the surface but there is still infection underneath. We forgive, but don't realize that more acts of forgiveness are needed to bring about complete healing. Jesus wanted Peter and us to learn to forgive not just seven times, which a lot, but 77 times, which means unlimited forgiveness. The mercy we have received from God, we should give to others.

This is another reason to have a consistent daily prayer life. Forgiveness does not come easily, and the wounds may take time to heal. When we pray for others who have offended us, it helps to soften our heart. The CCC puts it so well, **"the heart that offers itself to the Holy Spirit turns injury into compassion and purifies the memory in transforming the hurt into intercession"** (#2843).

If you don't already do so, I encourage you to make a Morning Offering. From the first moment we awake, we give God all our “**prayers, works, joys and sufferings**” of the day to come. It only takes a matter of seconds, but it sets the tone for the rest of the day on a positive note. We should begin each day thinking of God, first.