

## 24 A

*Late one night a cheerful truck driver pulled up to a roadside café for some refreshments. As he was eating, three mean-looking motorcyclists roared up to the café's entrance. Immediately they picked on the truck driver as a target for their nastiness. One poured salt and pepper on his head, another took his apple pie, placed it on the floor and squashed it under a dirty boot; the third knocked over his coffee, causing it to spill on his lap. The driver didn't say a word. He merely rose, walked slowly to the cashier, calmly paid for his meal and made his exit. 'That dude ain't much of a fighter', sneered one of the bikers. The waiter peered out of the window and said: 'He doesn't seem to be much of a driver either. He's just run his truck over three motorbikes'.*

They say that revenge is sweet but eventually it leaves a sour taste in the mouth. You may remember the 1990's war between Serbia and Croatia – well some historians say that settling old scores from WW11 had a lot to do with it. We know that in the time of the Old Testament i.e. before the coming of Christ, the teaching was 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth'. The bombing of Dresden in 1945 was also driven by an Old Testament passage which ran 'they sowed the wind they'll reap the whirlwind' but the teaching of Jesus is quite the opposite. If we want to be his followers he stipulates that we must love our enemies and do good to those who hate us.

Many people in their personal lives have scores to be settled - all waiting for an opportunity to get even. Feuds, vendettas, grudges are often nurtured in parishes, in streets and especially in families. Many are even passed down the generations. Some make up and bury the hatchet but are careful to mark the spot. But when God forgives he readily forgets.

Jesus died on the Cross to cancel all the debt of our sins. Forgiveness is indicative of holiness. The opposite is also true

as the First Reading reminds us: 'Resentment and anger, these are foul things and both are found with the sinner'. A good example of heroic forgiveness was when the late Pope Saint John Paul 11 visited the prison cell of the man who tried to kill him, threw his arms round him and forgave him. That's the stuff which saints are made of.

We're advised not to let the 'sun go down on our anger'. In forgiving someone we're not downplaying or trivialising their wrongdoing but hoping and praying they'll 'come to their senses' and have a change of heart. Regrettably some carry their un-forgiveness to the grave.

So let us never let God's forgiveness go-a-begging, bearing in mind that God can only forgive us inasmuch as we forgive others. There is no relationship so strained, no hurt so painful, no sin so heinous, no heart so wounded that cannot be healed by the grace of God.

*The Good Thief sought forgiveness in his dying moments and was rewarded with Paradise. Jesus forgave His cruel executioners from the cross. No one is outside the range of His mercy.*