



TCH24

24th Sunday Ordinary Time Aiii – Excerpts From Ecclesiasticus 27, Romans 14, Matthew 18

The Revenant

Knowing God's forgiveness in our own lives is the only thing that will help us forgive others
Fr David King – 13th September 2020

You will benefit greatly from reading through the Gospel before reading this (Matthew 18.21-35)

1. Iñárritu

During the lockdown I re-watched one of my favourite films called 'The Revenant' with Tom Hardy and Leonardo Di Caprio (both of whom are brilliant in it) from 2015. It's a cracking film, and it won a couple of Oscars that year, but it's very brutal and violent so I wouldn't recommend you watch it unless you like that kind of stuff.

It's set in the harsh, cold wilderness of Northern Dakota in the year 1823, and centres around a group of trappers out in the middle of nowhere hunting pelts. It's a very dangerous world; it's bitterly cold, there're wild animals to contend with and they're fearful of being attacked by Native Americans as relations are at an all time low.

- One of the party, Hugh Glass, whilst looking for food away from the others, is attacked by a Grizzly Bear and left half dead from his horrific injuries. When the others find him they just can't see how he will survive, but his son, who is with them, demands that he is cared for, not just left to die.
- But one of the other members in the group, Fitzgerald (who is a really nasty piece of work), thinks that taking care of this injured man is going to slow them down and put all their lives at risk, leaving them vulnerable to attacks from bears and Native Americans, so, when he thinks that no one is watching, he secretly tries to finish him off.
- But he is caught in the act by the injured man's son, who is, of course, outraged at this. A fight ensues, in which Fitzgerald ends up killing the son as well. And then, believing the injured man will die from his wounds, just leaves him there in the middle of nowhere and takes off with everyone.
- This all happens at the start of the film, and then there begins this story of survival and, of course, *vengeance*. Hugh Glass, has been brutally betrayed by this Fitzgerald guy, who not only tried to kill him, but also killed his son. He is determined to get his revenge.
 - And I have to say, it's a great film! And that's the thing! As the viewer you are totally on his side willing him to succeed! You want him to live, because you want to see vengeance done! You feel that such a huge injustice has been done, and you desperately want a sense of order to be restored. And for this awful Fitzgerald guy to get his comeuppance.
- That is definitely what you experience as the viewer, or at least it is what I experienced. And it highlights how counter intuitive and counter-cultural forgiveness is. It's hard, it's not what we feel like doing all of the time and yet of course, it is absolutely what Jesus calls us to.

2. Jesus

- Before we look at the story in the Gospel, it's important to put this in context a little. Forgiveness, for Jesus, was clearly not just a nice bit of teaching that he left us for the truly aspirational ones. No. Forgiveness, for Jesus, was front and central to his kingdom movement. He refers to it so much that he clearly intended it to be the defining characteristic of his disciples.
 - Previous to this chapter, he taught his followers to practise it and pray for it, it was a big theme in the Sermon on the Mount, and here he returns to it, and immediately opens up this passage by saying, this isn't about how many times you have to do it, you just gotta do it, you gotta make a lifestyle of it.
- So, if it's so important, let's turn to the meaning of the story. This whole story is beautifully designed to throw a spotlight on the hypocrisy of receiving forgiveness if we then don't pass it on.
- The story, very cleverly, taps in to that same sense of injustice that the film did, the man who receives forgiveness and fails to pass it on makes us squirm uncomfortably. But that's the genius thing; that's us!! If we are receiving God's forgiveness and then failing to pass it on to others, we're just doing exactly what the man in the parable is doing! It's our own behaviour that is making us squirm.
 - Jesus is saying that receiving forgiveness means that you have to pass it on, that's the only logical, sensible, rational thing, otherwise it just becomes farcical, like in the story.
- So, yes, the story stands to highlight the hypocrisy of our own behaviour. How can we come to Mass and at the start receive forgiveness for all our sins, if we then walk out of here and start throttling other people?

3. Me

- Having looked at the meaning of the story, we are led to the far more practical point of what will help us do it. All this leads us to the inevitable conclusion, *that knowing God's forgiveness in our own lives is really the only thing that will help us forgive others*. When something so good comes pouring into your lap, and then more and more of it, after a while it becomes natural to pass it on, to give it away, as you have so much of it! So maybe a first step is recognising what's pouring into our lap.
- And perhaps we're getting to the heart of why there's a bit of emphasis on acknowledging our own sinfulness and receiving God's forgiveness in the Church. Maybe it's not because we are so awful and we just need to be constantly saying sorry. Perhaps the Church knows and has intuited that its only in receiving forgiveness that we will be able to pass it on.
 - And actually how true this is all beginning to sound? That I, we, have received so much forgiveness! Am I going to walk out of here and start throttling people?
- You can see how this all begins to make sense now, how it's all connected. We love because he loved us first, we forgive because we are forgiven. This is how the Christian thing works, we are just passing on what we have received.

Jesus, help me to know how much I have received from you, that I may pass it on to others