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24th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A) 2020

French author Victor Hugo has a short story titled, "93." In the midst of this tale, a ship at sea is caught in a terrific storm. Buffeted by the waves, the ship rocks to and fro, when suddenly the crew hears an awesome crashing sound below deck. They know what it is. A cannon they are carrying has broken loose and is smashing into the ship's sides with every list of the ship. Two brave sailors, at the risk of their lives, manage to go below and fasten it again, for they know that the heavy cannon on the inside of their ship is more dangerous to them than the storm on the outside. So it is with people. Problems within are often much more destructive to us than the problems without. Today, God's word would take us "below decks" to look inside ourselves concerning the whole matter of forgiveness. Refusing to forgive is a form of anger that we will not let go of, or as the first reading from the book of Sirach describes so poetically, "Wrath and anger are hateful things, yet the sinner hugs them tight." How often have we hugged a grudge tightly? We just can't let it go? We've all carried a grudge. Whether we were hurt by a friend, family member or co-worker. We can feel wounded and hold onto our anger, to the point where it defines us as a victim. Again, the book of Sirach said, "The vengeful will suffer the Lord's vengeance, for He remembers their sins in detail." The "logic" of mercy is very simple according to the book of

Sirach, "Forgive your neighbor's injustice; then your own sins will be forgiven." This is also the message of the Gospel when it comes to ourselves being forgiven, "So will my Heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives your brother from your heart." So, we can't be forgiven unless we are willing to forgive. Only forgiveness will allow us to loosen our grip on the anger we hug tight. So, our lack of forgiveness has only negative effects on us. If we don't forgive, the Lord remembers our sins in detail; we should not expect to be healed by the Lord; we will not be forgiven; and as it says in the Gospel, we will be handed over to the torturers. What are the torturers? They are such things as compulsiveness, fear, depression, self-hatred, anxiety, and other evils. Those are the loose cannons that are smashing our insides when we can't forgive. I don't think there is any power of healing that is stronger than the healing power of forgiveness. To use the words of Shakespeare, forgiveness is "twice blest." It blesses the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven. Think about it, when we forgive someone who has hurt us, it is so freeing; it is like letting go of a very heavy weight. And likewise, the person who is forgiven is transformed in such a way that they are no longer bitter and hateful, because they are finally free of the guilt that has weighed them down. However, as the saying goes, "to err is human; to forgive is divine." So, to forgive is a grace we must ask for. Sometimes our human strength is not enough and we must ask God in humility and prayer. Sometimes it takes time to receive this

grace, especially if we are deeply wounded. It can take a lot of prayer, a lot of patience, and a whole lot of humility. It's difficult to say, "I forgive you." It's easier to forgive the way Jesus does. When Jesus forgave His enemies on the cross, He turned to the Father and said, "Father, forgive them. They know not what they do." When we find it too hard to say, "I forgive you," we too must turn to the Father, because in the end only God can really forgive. We have to turn to the Father and say those words of Jesus, "Father, forgive him – or forgive her – because he (or she) doesn't know what he (or she) is doing." To forgive we have to go through the heart of the Father. He is the source of forgiveness. It is not in me; it's the heart of God, and that's where we need to go looking for it. So, to make it a bit more concrete, the next time you are struggling with forgiving someone from the heart, try this. Bring the person to the forefront of your mind. Then, picture Jesus on the cross and, standing underneath the cross you envision our Blessed Mother and yourself at her side. Then take it one step further and envision the person you're trying to forgive right next to you. Remind yourself that Jesus is not dying just for you, but also for that person that you are trying to forgive. Ask Jesus to give you His merciful heart for the one who has wounded you and ask our Blessed Mother to embrace you in this endeavor. You may not feel anything immediately, but with repetition, you have started down the road to forgiveness and have begun to secure that loose cannon within you.