

**Msgr. Dennis Sheehan**  
**Homily Given on September 11, 2011**  
**24th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Liturgical Year A**

Children are not born hating anyone. They have to learn hatred. They have to be taught who is the proper object of hatred: people of color, Jews, Muslims. Teens in our cities learn to hate members of other gangs.

Just how lethal lessons in hatred can be was made horribly clear ten years ago this day at 8:46am. American Airlines Flight 11 from Boston slammed 91 passengers in a fuel-loaded plane into New York's World Trade Tower. It was the beginning of multiple, destructive tragedies. It was carried out by men trained to hatred. So deeply did they hate America and its people that they were willing to become a holocaust.

That carnage left a deep wound in our collective American psyche. News media this past week have clearly shown that the wound is by no means healed. We've fought Taliban in Afghanistan, Saddam Hussain in Iraq. Seal Team Six took out Osama bin Laden. Yet none of this has brought healing.

Today we bring our hurts again here to God's altar. We hear Jesus' parable about mercy and forgiveness. He tells of a man who had an impossible debt – the rough equivalent of 150,000 years of laboring wages. It's deliberate exaggeration, geared to show God's mercy beyond our wildest dreams. Jesus' first point is quite clear: God's mercy to you and to me is beyond any limit, any reckoning, any calculation.

But, having made that point, Jesus gets to the difficult part. God has forgiven us so that we can forgive others. But on September 11, we understandably ask: *Aren't some actions too horrible to forgive?*

September 11 is not alone. It stands with the death camps of Nazi Germany, the genocide of Armenia and modern Rwanda. Looking to these extremes we quite naturally ask: *Isn't forgiving those who perpetrated September 11 too much to ask?*

Jesus' answer is quite direct. We have been massively forgiven. We are to forgive on the scale we have been forgiven.

We are not responsible for the enormous hurt of September 11. But we are responsible for our reaction to that. We can choose.

We can hold on to the hate. Remember, though, holding on to hate is like drinking poison in the hope that our enemy will die.

Forgiveness is not the same as forgetting. Reconciliation is not always the outcome. Forgiveness means trusting that God will be the judge, not you or I. "Forgiving," said one great preacher, "means abandoning your right to pay back. But it's a loss that sets us free."

We do not naturally let go of hurts. It takes the grace and mercy of God. We have to learn, says Jesus, today of all days. Children learn to forgive when we show them the way. "Forgive us our trespasses," we pray, "as we forgive those who trespass against us." No matter how greatly. No matter how often. Amen.