

**Lectionary readings: Genesis 50: 15-21; Psalm 103: 8-13;
Romans 14: 1-12; Matthew 18: 21-35**

For reflection and prayer

- **Genesis 50:** *'You planned evil against me but God used these same plans for my good ... life for many people.'* (v20 The Message) We all experience hurts, disappointments, betrayal, misfortune as we go through life. Can we say, like Joseph, that God has used all these things for our good? Have we allowed the experiences of life to diminish us or to bring growth? Have we allowed our experiences to embitter us, or have we been able to ask what we can learn from these experiences? Joseph was able to forgive his brothers - no thought of revenge - for he was open to God and knew that all he had been through had not only brought good for him, but for many others too. Quite a lot to challenge each one of us this week.
- **Psalm 103:** This is the God we worship, according to the Psalmist: He is merciful, gracious, slow to get angry, full of unfailing love, generous in His judgement of us, willing to forgive us, tender, compassionate, like a father to us. We need constantly to reflect on who our God is and whether the God we worship is true to the picture the Bible gives us of Him and the kind of God Jesus shows us. So often our reluctance to approach God, or to 'trouble' God, is because our perception of Him is very different from this God who has nothing but love in His heart for us.
- **Romans 14:** Paul urges us to deal very gently with people, especially with those who have different

opinions and views from us. Paul says we have to allow each person to be who he/she is, and not force our views on others. Whatever we do, however we live, it is important, Paul says, for us to do what we do for the glory of God, not to boost ourselves. So let's stop criticising one another. And let's look to ourselves and make sure that we are living as God wants us to, without thinking we can correct others. Acceptance, love, respect, inclusiveness are far more important in the Christian church than arguing over doctrines. So let's use this week to bless one another and reach out with love and acceptance to all.

- **Matthew 18:** Just as prayer is not about 'saying prayers', but living prayerfully, so forgiveness is not about the occasional act, but living with such a generous spirit towards others that forgiveness becomes a way of life. *'Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.'* So we pray often. We are like the servant who owed the king a huge debt, and was forgiven. God has forgiven each of us so much. How can we possibly withhold forgiveness from others? Let's reflect this week on the question: How forgiving am I? Here is a quotation from Margaret Silf for us to reflect on: *'Just when I thought I had finally forgiven him, a chance remark awakened all the old resentments. How deep must my forgiveness go, Lord? From the quiver on my lips through the tears in my eyes, right down to the gash in my heart!'* And now another quotation, this time from Henri Nouwen: *'God's forgiveness is unconditional; it comes from a heart that does not demand anything for itself, a heart that is completely empty of self-seeking. It is this divine forgiveness that I have to practise in my daily life.'*