

A talk for the parish on Education Sunday, 13th September 2026

Good morning, today, the Catholic Church in England and Wales, celebrates Education Sunday and the theme is forgiveness.

Let me start with a question, don't worry, no hands up needed, just have a think. 'Has anyone ever fallen out with a friend, and then made up again?'

I bet almost everyone here has a story like that. Maybe someone said something unkind, or let you down, or offended you. And then, somehow, you found your way back to being friends. That moment of making up, of saying sorry and meaning it, of being forgiven and forgiving, that is what Education Sunday is about.

Jesus knew it was a hard message when, he told Peter not to forgive 7 times but 77 times. Even Jesus' closest friends, the disciples, found it difficult. Forgiving once is hard enough. Forgiving the same person for the same thing, over and over? That can feel almost impossible.

Education isn't only about what we learn; it's about 'what kind of people we are becoming.'

Every day in our schools, colleges and universities, children and adults alike are learning far more than the subjects on the timetable. They're learning how to treat one another. How to listen. How to say sorry, and how to accept an apology graciously. How to let go of a grudge instead of carrying it around all day like a heavy school bag.

St Paul, writing to the early Christians in Rome, urged them to accept one another, to stop judging one another, and to remember that none of us lives only for ourselves. We belong to each other. When one person in our school, our family, or our parish is hurting or struggling, it touches all of us. And when one person is shown grace, that grace has a way of spreading outward and multiplying.

Human development doesn't happen in isolation. A school, like a parish, a family or a college is a whole web of trustworthy relationships and human interaction...between young people and their classmates, between students and staff, between staff and parents, between governors, parish priests,

catering and site teams, and the wider community around the school gates. Forgiveness and grace only happen where there is trust: where a child knows a teacher will listen fairly, where a parent knows they can raise a worry without judgement, where people know they can be honest with one another and still be respected the next day. The sense of belonging, of genuinely mattering to one another, doesn't happen by accident. It's built, patiently, through small acts of kindness, honesty and forgiveness, day after day. When trust is strong between all these people, a school, college or university becomes something more than a place of learning; it becomes a true community where people from different backgrounds, ages and roles can genuinely flourish together.

Something I often grapple with is remembering that my thoughts are not facts. They are just my thoughts and other people think differently. Because of this, we all have a duty to really listen to each other, to compromise and refine our thinking to show that we respect the dignity of every individual. What we think about is really important because our thinking influences our feelings and our feelings determine our behaviours and actions.

So, you might ask, 'Why is what anyone thinks about important?' or 'What have thoughts and feelings got to do with forgiveness?' Forgiveness is the theme of this year's Education Sunday. Thoughts and feelings are important because we can't give what we haven't got. So, only if we feel forgiven, and are at peace with the challenges in our lives, can we forgive and share peace with others.

In today's psalm we repeated, 'The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and rich in mercy.' This is a reminder that we forgive because we know what it is to be forgiven ourselves.

So today, whether you're five years old or eighty-five, whether you're sitting your first spelling test this week, or moving away from home for further education, or you left school sixty years ago and never stopped loving to learn here is something to think about:

To children: the next time someone says sorry to you, try to really forgive them, don't just say "it's fine" through gritted teeth, but properly let it go.

To young people and adults: think of one relationship in your life that could do with a fresh start. Is there space this week to reach out, forgive, or ask for forgiveness?

To all of us: remember that God's forgiveness comes before we even ask for it. We are already loved. Already forgiven. Our job is simply to pass on that gift.

Choosing to live a Christian life, is an education in forgiveness, grace and trustworthy relationships. We never graduate from it. We keep learning, keep practising, keep getting it a little more right each time, with God's help.

Every September I love welcoming our new Nursery and Reception children. I love it because it is the first time in their lives that children have the opportunity to choose their own friends. Prior to joining school or nursery, most children have only interacted with family or friends that parents have chosen for them. When they join a classroom environment they gravitate towards people that they choose as their friends and that is a significant moment in each child's development. Each new start....starting a new school, starting college or university, starting a new joball present the opportunity for personal development.

As we begin this new academic year, we hope our schools, colleges and universities are places where great friendships are forged and forgiveness is freely given..... places that help us all develop into the person Christ is calling us to be.

Be kind, to others and yourself, have a happy Education Sunday.