

In the second reading (*Romans 14:7-9*), St Paul begins: ‘the life and death of each of us has its influence on others’.

There are many ways our lives can influence others. I will highlight two ways: **challenge**, which was in last Sunday’s gospel (*Matthew 18:15-20*) and **forgiveness**, which is in this Sunday’s gospel (*Matthew 18:21-35*).

This is a continuation of a theme from last Sunday. It is this: our actions and our failures in this life are important for our salvation and for the salvation of the world. When I pray through the difficulties of how to challenge and how to forgive then I am exercising the power of binding and loosing that Jesus gave to Peter and to the whole Church

Learning how to challenge and how to forgive is a lifelong learning. Few complete it in this life. But, with the grace of God, we keep trying.

Notice that they are almost side by side in St Matthew’s gospel. And both are commanded. If I think my brother or friend is doing wrong, it may be that I am called gently to challenge his behaviour, but also to forgive him.

Forgiveness without challenge may be empty.

Challenge without forgiveness, or at least the hope of forgiveness, quickly becomes argument, competition, possibly even revenge.

The world often thinks that challenge and forgiveness are far apart. The Gospel teaches us that at their best they go hand-in-hand.