

**24th Sunday in Ordinary Time
September 11, 2011**

10 Am & 12 noon Liturgies

J.A. Loftus, S.J.

Today is a day when millions of people around the world will take a deep breath. I say the world because on this day ten years ago the world changed—not just the United States, not just us, not just “them,” but the whole world. One deep breath seems the least we can do.

There are occasions, even in churches, when silence might profitably replace sermonizing. Today might be one of those occasions. I will be brief. But I am struck by the fact that those who come to pray today—anywhere in the world—will hear the same radically challenging scripture readings. And I wonder what all those worshipers will think.

It seems bitterly ironic that on a day when many will cheer the retribution and vengeance that has already been wrought, we listen to words of forgiveness. When others will speak of increased global security and readiness at arms, we will sing of compassion and an altogether different kind of justice. Psalm 103: “The Lord is kind and merciful, slow to anger, and rich in compassion.”

My brothers and sisters, I’m afraid our scriptures today will sound

even more unrealistic and airy than usual and will be very hard on ears around the world. But they are our scriptures; they are a word of God speaking to us today; they cannot be ignored even if I don't know exactly what to say about them.

Listen again to highlights from Sirach: "Wrath and anger are hateful things; the sinner hugs them tight....The vengeful will suffer the Lord's vengeance. Forgive your neighbor's injustice, then when you pray, your own sins will be forgiven."

And what of St. Matthew? How often do I forgive, asks the ever-blurry Peter? And Jesus answers not with the mathematics of reconciliation; seventy times seven is just a clever play on words. Jesus answers with mandate to change one's whole life into a journey of reconciliation. Forgiveness is an attitude that is born deep in the bowels of a soul. Forgiveness towards each other becomes the condition of possibility for God's forgiveness of anyone. Yes, that does mean you and me!

Mary Jo Leddy is a Canadian social and religious activist (as well as a member of the Jesuit faculty at the University of Toronto). She wrote a wonderful book on gratitude almost ten years ago (*Radical Gratitude*, Orbis,

2002). She uses an image that might be helpful as we take our one deep breath today. She says there is a great principle innate within reality itself. It is that “the air you breathe into the universe is the air that it will breathe back and if your energy is right it will renew itself even as you give it away.”

So what air are we breathing out into the universe today? Is it the air of gratitude, of generosity, of honesty, joy, delight? Is it the air of forgiveness as today’s readings demand? Do we breathe out the air of concern for the poor, the suffering, the bothersome? Do we breathe out the air of reconciliation even toward our enemies?

Please remember: I did not write today’s scriptures. I just have the privilege to preach on them. This is especially where I think silence might prevail over sermonizing. What air are we breathing out? How can it be the air of forgiveness—on this, of all days?

Just remember: there is a mystery at the center of the universe that is also at the center of the gospel of forgiveness. The air we breathe out into the world is the air we will re-inhale. As you take your one deep breath today, may God bless each of you abundantly. Peace!

J. A. Loftus, S.J.