

Scripture Study

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle A



Opening prayer

Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18

(Ps 103:1-4, 8, 10, 12-13)

1 Corinthians 3:16-23

Matthew 5:38-48

Overview of the Gospel:

- Continuing with the Sermon on the Mount we have been hearing from in the last several weeks, this Sunday we will hear the remainder of the section of Matthew 5 sometimes called “the Six Antitheses”. Each antithesis follows a similar format: Jesus citing the Old Law, saying “*you have heard it was said...*”, and responding with the refrain “*...But I say to you*”. Jesus is thus established as the new Moses and the lawgiver of the New Covenant.
- In verses 38-42, Jesus speaks about the law of retaliation. The command “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth” (taken from Exodus 21:24) sounds harsh to our ears, but in the context of the ancient Middle East, it was actually an enlightened improvement on the prevailing practice which allowed unlimited retaliation for offenses committed. Even so, Jesus goes even further in eliminating the policy of private retaliation from the personal life of the disciple (Romans 12:17).
- In verses 43-48, Jesus reminds his hearers of what was considered one of the two greatest commandments (Mt 22:39), that is, to love one’s neighbor as oneself (see Lev 19:18) along with the common belief that one should “hate” their enemies (the Jews of the time had a very definition of “neighbor”, restricting it to fellow Jews; thus the parable of the Good Samaritan. See Lk 10:29-37). Jesus, in this instance, removes limits on to whom they are to extend their charity. In fact, they (and we) are to strive to imitate the perfection of God the Father who has solicitude for all (verses 45, 48).

Questions:

- In the 1st Reading, how is the commandment given by Moses, though good, still limited? In what way or ways is the new commandment given by Jesus superior?
- In the 2nd Reading, what is the basis of our dignity in the Lord (verse 16)? In the context of verse 17 and Mt 5:48, how should we conduct ourselves?
- What was the original intent of “an eye for an eye”? How is this law being perverted? What qualities should replace those desires for revenge?
- Although the standards Jesus gives are not a new law we must attain before God will have mercy on us, what do they suggest about the direction God wants us to grow after we have received his mercy? Which of these qualities do you want to cultivate most right now? How would your life be different as God helps you to do this?
- What “enemies” has God given you to love? How can you love them? Why does he command you to love them?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 1693, 1825, 1933, 1968, 2013, 2054, 2262, 2303, 2443, 2608, 2844

Closing Prayer

Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings!

Your duty is to sanctify yourself. Yes, even you. Who thinks that this task is only for priests and religious? To everyone, without exception, our Lord said: ‘Be ye perfect, as My Heavenly Father is perfect’.

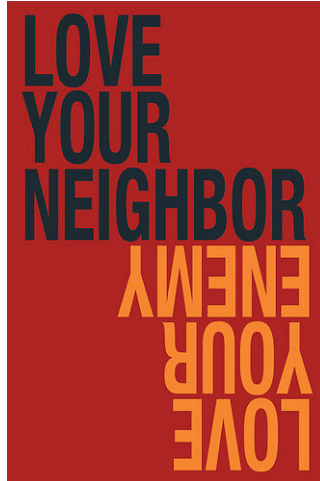
--St Josemaria Escriva

"Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect"

Scripture: Matthew 5:38-48

Meditation: If someone insults you or tries to take advantage of you, how do you respond? Do you repay in kind? Jesus approached the question of just retribution with a surprising revelation of God's intention for how we should treat others, especially those who mistreat us. When Jesus spoke about God's law, he did something no one had done before. He gave a new standard based not just on the requirements of justice – giving each their due – but based on the law of grace and love. Jesus knew the law and its intention better than any jurist or legal expert could imagine. He quoted from the oldest recorded law in the world: *If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe* (Exodus 21:23-25). Such a law today seems cruel, but it was meant to limit vengeance as a first step towards mercy. This law was not normally taken literally but served as a guide for a judge in a law court for assessing punishment and penalty (see Deuteronomy 19:18). The Old Testament is full of references to the command that we must be merciful: *You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD* (Leviticus 19:18). *If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink* (Proverbs 25:21). *Do not say, "I will do to him as he has done to me; I will pay the man back for what he has done"* (Proverbs 24:29). *Let him give his cheek to the smiter, and be filled with insults* (Lamentations 3:30).

Jesus does something quite remarkable and unheard of. He transforms the law of mercy with



grace and loving-kindness. Jesus also makes clear that there is no room for retaliation. We must not only avoid returning evil for evil, but we must seek the good of those who wish us ill. Do you accept insults, as Jesus did, with no resentment or malice? When you are compelled by others to do more than you think you deserve, do you insist on your rights, or do you respond with grace and cheerfulness?

What makes Christians different from others and what makes Christianity distinct from any other religion? It is *grace* – treating others, not as they deserve, but as God wishes them to be treated – with loving-kindness and mercy. God is good to the unjust as well as the just. His love embraces saint and sinner alike. God seeks our highest good and teaches us to seek the greatest good of others, even those who hate and abuse us. Our love for others, even those who are ungrateful and selfish towards us, must be marked by the same kindness and mercy which God has shown to us. It is easier to show kindness and mercy when we can expect to benefit from doing so. How much harder when we can expect nothing in return. Our prayer for those who do us ill both breaks the power of revenge and releases the power of love to do good in the face of evil. How can we

possibly love those who cause us harm or ill-will? With God all things are possible. He gives power and grace to those who believe and accept the gift of the Holy Spirit. His love conquers all, even our hurts, fears, prejudices and griefs. Only the cross of Jesus Christ can free us from the tyranny of malice, hatred, revenge, and resentment and gives us the courage to return evil with good. Such love and grace has power to heal and to save from destruction. Do you know the power of Christ's redeeming love and mercy?

Was Jesus exaggerating when he said we must be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect? The original meaning of "perfect" in Aramaic is "completeness" or "wholeness – not lacking in what is essential." God gives us every good gift in Jesus Christ so that we may not lack anything we need to do his will and to live as his sons and daughters (2 Peter 1:3). He knows our weakness and sinfulness better than we do. And he assures us of his love, mercy, and grace to follow in his ways. Do you want to grow in your love for God and for your neighbor? Ask the Holy Spirit to change and transform you in the image of the Father that you may walk in the joy and freedom of the gospel.

"Lord Jesus, your love brings freedom and pardon. Fill me with your Holy Spirit and set my heart ablaze with your love that nothing may make me lose my temper, ruffle my peace, take away my joy, nor make me bitter towards anyone."

Meditation: © 2011 Don Schwager
www.rc.net/wcc/readings/