

Feb 23, 2020 Readings: no. 79, p. 457; BG, p. 276 1st Reading: Leviticus 19.1-2, 17-18 2nd Reading: 1 Corinthians 3.16-23 Gospel: Matthew 5.38-48 7th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Can you imagine the almighty and sovereign God informing people, they be holy as He is holy? To be holy is in many ways to be balanced, integrated and upright. God is no doubt holy. But could Creator really suggest that created beings be similar? Very often we settle for being only as upright, as is necessary to navigate the world. But this standard is always short and flawed. We should want to recognize in God's message the beautiful invitation to join Him, in a state of holiness. But, how lofty an expectation, and how do we even begin to approach this level of holiness? If we imagine that God has invited us to something beyond our capacity, we will worship very ordinary, temporal, and cultural gods? Friends, our God is not cruel, but is rather the Supreme Enabler. God asks nothing of humankind without first equipping us. Children are the first beneficiaries of their parent's resources and so too, Children of God are offered unlimited access to our Father. The sooner we squelch any bent towards rebellion, the sooner and more fully becomes our ascent towards holiness. The Holy Spirit acting in the sacraments of the Church whisks us off towards Jesus who makes our holiness possible.

As God, graciously reaches into the human condition, so too, we want to grasp the hand that reaches out first to us. In the moment our hearts meet, joy, peace, and love are enabled. In citing the Levitical passage, “You shall love your neighbour, as yourself” Jesus, repeats again only what the Father says earlier in the Law. Jesus enforces that any strategy into holiness pays attention to balance. But first, Jesus expands the description of neighbour to include even one’s enemies. Family, wife and husband, maybe of next of kin, perhaps a close friend, we can see ourselves loving, but this directive falls over the cliff, when, we must make room to include even adversaries and people who make life unpleasant? We need in those difficult situations to turn our gaze towards the One who delivers the standard for holiness. Jesus our Christ.

If difficult, to suppose we can be holy, imagine that at our baptism we are consecrated, anointed and made temples of the Holy Spirit. Would God dwell anywhere, but in a holy place? Believe also folks, that when we consume the body and blood of Christ, we are truly reposing the Blessed Sacrament into the sacred tabernacles of our Body.

Through Baptism and Holy Eucharist, God most assuredly enables us to be holy and to bring holiness to our world. Each of the sacraments are in fact similar touch points with the Divine.

Many people struggle with an “eye for an eye, and tooth for a tooth” teaching. Some see the instruction as a licence to exact revenge. Friends, it most assuredly is never justification or a rallying cry for revenge. It is given as acknowledgement that injustice must be corrected and not ignored. When persecution merely exchanges places with the oppressor, the teeter-totter only slopes in the other direction. No more measures are to be taken than are necessary to return to balance. This is why, state punishment by death is small and wrong. The hope for mercy is taken from both the individual and community.

Jesus ratifies into new law that we are to love our enemies. Who though is really our enemies? Is it an obsession with power and prestige? Is it a lust for physical gratification? Or is our greater enemy an addiction to the fickle approval of others? Our enemy, friends, is any gnawing on our hearts and minds that turns us away from God. The most challenging of which normally lives within!

Our Lord teaches that love disarms our enemies. Remember, Christian love is not about showering our enemies with affection but is more about healing. Jesus comes to balance and heal damaged relationship with the Father. And Jesus remains among us continuing to heal most assuredly in this Holy Eucharist.

There's a second part to Jesus' instruction that we sometimes overlook. We are also to pray for those who persecute us. Again, this is not a shallow cry for hugs and kisses. It is perhaps, the deeper more difficult ask of love. To pray is to be in relationship, but nature teaches us to flee from, or destroy our enemies. The sacraments and the Gospel are again the enablers that overcome unwilling nature. We couldn't, if we wanted to, destroy nor abandon those to whom we are intrinsically connected, even it be acrimoniously. The Christian prays for their enemies and neither asks God to do what we know is unholy. God doesn't send us enemies. He sends us Jesus.

And so, friends with Lent just days away, let us set out for holiness together and in balance. May our imperfections be transfigured and cast aside this Lent. The Gospel of Jesus and this commandment of Love will show us the way.

Amen