

FEBRUARY 23, 2020
Sunday of the 7th Week in OT
Matthew 5: 38-48

TO RETURN EVIL FOR GOOD IS DIVINE.

On his first Sunday Papal Angelus on March 17, 2013, “Pope Francis mentioned meeting a very old woman at a religious festival while still archbishop of Buenos Aries, Argentina. He asked her, ‘Grandmother ... would you like to make your confession? But, if you have not sinned ...’ and she said, ‘we all have sinned.’ Francis said: ‘If perhaps he should not forgive you?’ and she replied, ‘The Lord forgives everything.’ He asked, ‘How do you know this for sure, madam?’ and she replied, ‘If the Lord had not forgiven all, then the world wouldn’t [still] be here.’ And, I wanted to ask her, ‘Madam, did you study at the Gregorian?’ The Gregorian is a pontifical university in Rome, the oldest Jesuit university, established in 1551 by the order’s founder St Ignatius Loyola. Francis is the first pope from the order. The elderly woman showed great wisdom, surely given by the Holy Spirit, Francis continued, and he said: ‘Let us not forget this word: God never tires of forgiving us, but we sometimes tire of asking Him to forgive us. Let us never tire of asking God’s forgiveness,’”¹

Our gospel for today is a continuation of last Sunday gospel wherein Jesus gave us four striking examples with a new thinking and perspective. He did not abolish the law and the prophets but fulfilled it.

“The most ancient law we know of teaches a tooth for a tooth and an eye for an eye. Its author is Hammurabi. He lived 4300 years ago. Hammurabi's law of tit for tat was not as gruesome as it sounds. His object was to limit revenge. Before Hammurabi, if you wronged one tribe member, his friends would murder your entire clan. Hammurabi

¹ www.ncronline.org

says, "No way." The only one to be punished is the perpetrator. His punishment is to be no heavier than the wrong he committed. Nor could the victim play the jury. A judge had to decide. It was understood he was not to become a hanging judge. But according to Jesus, if you are serious about being Christian, revenge is a no-no across the board. To return good for good is human. To return good for evil is divine. He wants us to be divine. He reminds us ANGER is but one letter short of DANGER. He tells us the best way to get even is to forgive as we have been forgiven. He wants us always to keep a cool head and a warm heart."²

My brothers and sisters, what makes us, disciples and followers of Jesus Christ different from everyone else and Christianity distinct from any other religion? It is not because of people, or dogma or any other thing. But it is grace coming from the Lord, that is, caring and treating others, not as they deserve, but as our Lord wishes them to be treated with compassion, love, kindness and mercy. "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 have power to heal and to save from destruction. The Lord Jesus suffered insult, abuse, injustice, and death on a cross for our sake. Scripture tells us that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin and guilt (Matthew 26:28; Ephesians 1:7, I John 1:7, Revelation 1:5). Since God has been merciful towards us through the offering of his Son, Jesus Christ, we in turn are called to be merciful towards our neighbor, even those who cause us grief and harm."³ We can not forgive others alone, we need God, we need graces to do that. We experience difficulties to forgive and love our enemies because we allow hatred and anger blanket our heart and God is not present. We can take away that resentment if we allow God to live in our hearts. We can do this because with God all are possible. Only in God that we

² Father James Gilhooley, www.homilies.net

³ dailyscripture.servantsoftheword.org

can be free from hatred, revenge, and resentment and gives us the courage to return evil with good.

This Wednesday, February 26, we will receive ashes with these words: "Repent and believe in the Gospel." I would like to remind you, Ash Wednesday is fasting and abstinence: one main meal, two smaller meals, no snacks, no meat, and give alms and offering to the church or to those in need. Jesus Christ is inviting to fasting, prayer and almsgiving and forgive, do good instead of evil, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. So, let us practice the message of our gospel for today and as we look forward to the Season of Lent: "Be holy, for I, the Lord your God am holy." Or as Jesus says, "So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect." Forgive your husband, your wife, even your former husband or wife, your friends and other people. Love more your children and those who persecute you or hurt you, pray for them. If we are truly followers of Jesus, Christians not only by name but by practice and example, we will do what Jesus Christ commanded us to do: love, forgive, pray and help.

Let this be our prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, your love, mercy and compassion bring healing, forgiveness, freedom and pardon. Fill me with your Spirit, set my heart on fire with your love so that I may love and serve those people around me, and take away in my heart resentment, anger and revenge so that I may really be called true Christian today and forever. Amen."