

# Homily For Saturday of the First Week of Lent - Year 1

## St Peter's 8:30am Mass- Mar 16, 2019

**Deuteronomy 26: 16-19** "You are to be a people holy to the Lord."

**Psalm 119: 1-8** "Happy are they who follow the law of the Lord!"

**Matthew 5: 43-48** "You must be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect."

### Introduction

There is a perfect game in baseball and in bowling. But they are only perfect by certain standards of the game.

There is a perfect homily .... well, maybe not.

After God Squad men's conferences, my wife: so when am I going to see this perfect husband?

### Gospel

But Jesus is the master of exaggerating for effect. It's just about another log in your eye, or cutting your hand off, or hating your mother and father .... ? Right? That's just Jesus being shocking on purpose. Bishop McCaig said last evening that it was shocking when Jesus declared that everyone must be more righteous than the Pharisees to enter heaven. On the other hand, we might be more surprised if he wasn't shocking. And we always have a choice: assume he doesn't really mean it or take him seriously.

Today it is that you must be perfect, and he gives an example: don't just love your friends. Love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you.

### On Being Perfect

We certainly have the idea of being perfect. There are people we call just that- perfectionists. I learned a long time ago that there are two kinds of perfectionists. One kind demands so much of themselves that they simply give up because it is too hard. If they don't give up, they live the stressful life of having to do everything perfectly. Many of these people can do it pretty well for a long time, but usually end up with stress related diseases or self medicating. 'Perfect' means that nothing is missing or lacking. Maybe Jesus is just setting an impossible goal that we can't possibly achieve so that we will realize this and be humble.

Modern motivational theory has a way of looking at the perfectly successful life. You can be rich. You can be and do anything you want if you a) eliminate negative self talk b) just believe in yourself c) take action and stop procrastinating d) do what successful people do.

A lot of these ideas sound attractive. I have been attracted to them myself, listening to hours of podcasts which tell me how to achieve that perfect formula for success and wealth and happiness. But for the Christian person, there is this big problem. How can I be perfect when every single day I show myself unable to eliminate the sin from my life? Every day I show myself a victim of the fallen human tendency to behave badly. How am I ever going to be perfect when my sin made his cross necessary? I put him there. We put him there because we couldn't save ourselves from ourselves from our imperfection, from the devastating effects of sin right here in our own hearts and lives.

### **Deuteronomy**

The Israelite people had to deal with the same issue. And, what is the message they were told? Walk in his ways and obey him. Walk in the ways of the perfect one, the Holy God. Observe his commands with all your heart and all your soul. Is there a greater perfection we can give than our entire heart and soul? It goes on: Be a people holy to the Lord. Be high above the nations. Be a sign to everyone around that we worship the God of perfect love, perfect judgment but also infinitely perfect mercy.

This was an echo from Leviticus: You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy. Talk about shocking. They would no longer be required to appease and satisfy the self centred gods of other nations but to become like the God who truly is God- perfect in all ways.

### **Psalm 119**

The psalmist says that if you do this you will be 'happy', which doesn't mean happy stoned, like we can do legally now. It means blessed by God. Happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord. Happy are those who keep his decrees, who seek him with their whole heart.

### **Jesus and the Father**

Ahead to Jesus again: You must be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect. What do we know about that Father. Philip asked what we ask: Show us the Father. Jesus said to Philip: Have I been with you all this time and you don't know that to have seen me is to have seen the Father. So, our Lord and saviour tells us that he is the perfect image of the Father, the very one with whom Jesus tells us to identify.

St. Paul thought a lot about how to do this. Last night, Jeff Cavins told us at the beginning of our God Squad men's conference (not too late to register for today), that to be a disciple of a certain rabbi or teacher, you had to be willing to mold yourself to become like that teacher.

So Paul worked hard to express this disciple's reality. Our life is different in Christ. The cross changes us. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. Jesus Christ, the perfect image of the Father, moves to the centre of my life. Put on Christ, he says. Clothe yourself in Christ. Before you dress every day, say I am putting on Christ today. Today, what people will see in me is the one I follow. I am his disciple. I have been changed by my encounter with him. I am in a transformative relationship with the perfect one.

To the Corinthians, who were prone to bad behaviour, Paul says: Don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you? God lives in you. The cross changes you from the inside so you want to stop living the life you have been living, turning away from sin and believing in the Gospel.

Jesus, the perfect image of the Father gives himself totally for you and I. That's what it means when he says: This is my body and blood, given for you. How could we deserve that if we aren't perfect. The truth is that we cannot deserve it. But, we are invited every day to live in the knowledge that to receive Christ is to receive perfection into our being.

Every Eucharist we bring our imperfect offering to the altar and He transforms it again and again and again into the perfect offering of himself, which we receive, then bring to the world. He never stops doing that even though I can't possibly deserve it on my own.

### **God Squad Theme: Do Not Be Afraid ... To Be A Saint**

John tells the early Christians: There is no fear in love. Perfect love drives out fear. Our God Squad theme is Do Not Be Afraid ... To Be A Saint. What is a saint? To be a saint is to have died to the imperfect self and been reborn to perfection IN CHRIST.

I still love the God Squad story. Over 20 years ago, some Calgary Police Officers didn't think, Oh, we can do something to make a perfect world, or even a perfect Calgary. But, they did see things on the mean streets of Calgary that inspired them to do something. They had to do SOMETHING.

One of the messages that comes through to men who attend our conferences is that Jesus wants for you perfect freedom from whatever it is that holds you a prisoner. Will you accept that perfect freedom? This is not something unattainable. It's what you were made for. Perfection in Christ. Loving with Christ. Living through Christ, even if it means loving enemies.

Today, many men will line up and offer up their imperfections to a priest. In return they will receive, in the sacrament of Reconciliation, perfect forgiveness. Every day God does indeed make perfection in him possible. There is only one question: Will we let ourselves be transformed into that perfection. Do not be afraid. it IS what you were made for.