

Homily for March 12, 2022,

Saturday 1st Week of Lent

Radical Love

Jesus challenged his disciples (as he challenges many of us) to love our enemies. At the present time there is a way this threat of enemy finds such a tangible expression globally with Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

But when we think of this personally our enemy is not as clear. Given our Lord's command, it is helpful to take a prayerful inventory of our enemies. Where is there discord? In our family? With a co-worker? Are our strong feelings real or imagined? Jesus did not make a distinction. If there is anyone in our life with whom we are unreconciled, we are called as Christians to love them and pray for them. Simple but not at all easy. How do we do it?

There is a paraphrase version of today's key imperative that goes like this:

I'm telling you to love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer, for then you are working out of your true selves, your God-created selves. This is what God does. He gives his best—the sun to warm and the rain to nourish—to everyone, regardless:¹

Jesus already knows whether we love our enemies or not, yet he asks us. With each question, he is in essence asking, "Are you willing to be my disciple?" To be a Christian means to be radically loving in a world where people hate whom they choose to hate and love whom they choose to love. Is there an upside to trying to love this way? According to Thomas á Kempis in *The Imitation of Christ*,

"The patient man goes through a great and salutary purgatory when he grieves more over the malice of one who harms him than for his own injury; when he prays readily for his enemies and forgives offenses from his heart; when he does not hesitate to ask pardon of others; when he is more easily moved to pity than to anger; when he does frequent violence to himself and tries to bring the body into complete subjection to the spirit."²

Why are we called to live this way? Well, because of the end goal of discipleship. Again to quote the paraphrase:

"In a word, what I'm saying is, Grow up. You're kingdom subjects. Now live like it. Live out your God-created identity. Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you."³

The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines perfection and holiness as synonymous: "All Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the

¹ Peterson, E. H. (2005). [*The Message: the Bible in contemporary language*](#) (Mt 5:44–45). NavPress.

² Imitation of Christ: Book 1 Chapter 24:

https://catholicarchive.org/thomas_a_kempis/the_imitation_of_christ/1/24.html

³ Peterson, E. H. (2005). [*The Message: the Bible in contemporary language*](#) (Mt 5:48). NavPress.

perfection of charity. All are called to holiness: ‘Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.’” It was the Jewish understanding that neighbors included only one’s fellow countrymen. Jesus was telling them that every person, enemy or not, is our neighbor. How can we love those who hurt us and wish us harm? We cannot on our own strength. But, as the Catechism states, perfection/holiness is possible if we “use the strength dealt out to [us] by Christ’s gift.” What is Christ’s gift? It is Christ himself. He is the gift given through his Passion, death and Resurrection. We can love those whom we consider enemies by loving in, with, and through Jesus. This is done by participating often in the sacraments (Mass and Reconciliation), spending time in prayer and in Scripture, and adoring Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

Let us pray:

Lord Jesus, these words are so difficult to embrace. Everything human in me wants to push back. Yet if I do, I push you away. You tell me the way to your peace is through loving and praying for my enemies. I need you. I cannot do this on my own. Strengthen me to love radically, as you do, Jesus.