

Homily for March 9, 2017

The Sermon on the Mount could be called a primer in Christian ethics. Here our Lord gives us his clearest teaching on how he came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. As we come to the end of the Sermon, the Lord summarizes his teaching in his most famous saying, the Golden Rule.

So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.

But what of the Golden Rule itself? It is a summary of biblical morality that found similar expression in the Old Testament and ancient Judaism. Jesus formulates it in the widest possible terms: Do to others whatever you would have them do to you (7:12). His words are a mini-commentary on the Mosaic precept, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:18). The underlying principle is the same in both: Everyone loves himself or herself and desires to be loved by others, so it is our moral duty to show love to all whose lives come into contact with our own. Confirmation of this link between the Mosaic law and the golden rule comes later in the Gospel when Jesus distills the message of the law and the prophets into the double commandment of love, the second part of which is "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (22:39). Notice that Jesus places no restriction on the scope of this rule. The others in question presumably include everyone, enemies as well as friends.

It is in light of the Golden Rule and the ethical teaching that is contained in the Sermon on the Mount that helps us to understand the Lord's teaching on prayer. When he encourages us to ask, to seek, and to knock, he means this especially in relation to the Golden Rule, in particular, and the Sermon on the Mount as a whole. The Father wants what is best for us. What is our best? To be perfect like He is perfect. For us perfection, means to be fully human. What does it mean to be fully human? It means to live out fully the Sermon on the Mount.

For the person who truly desires to grow living out this teaching and expresses this desire in prayer, the Lord will be faithful. We will experience a deepening conversion that enables us to truly grow into people who embody the Golden Rule. In chapter six Jesus said we are to seek God's Kingdom above everything else. What does this kingdom look like? It looks like the Golden Rule. Here is another way of stating it.

Here is a simple, rule-of-thumb guide for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you, then grab the initiative and do it for them. Add up God's Law and Prophets and this is what you get.

May we all be inspired to use this Lenten Season to read through the Sermon on the Mount as we ask, seek and knock in prayer to receive ever more deeply the good gift of living more fully these simple yet grace inspired words of Jesus so that with the psalmist we can pray: "The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me". What is that purpose:

"Treat other people exactly as you would like to be treated by them—this is the essence of all true religion.