

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Jan 7th 2016

Pope Francis' document for the Jubilee Year of Mercy: *Misericordiae Vultus*: "Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's Mercy."

"Whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen." - 1 John 4

Every now and then I see him from a distance at the gym we both belong to – the man who betrayed me for many years. I always look the other way to avoid eye contact or an encounter. This hardly seems like the loving behavior mandated by today's reading from John.

"If anyone says, 'I love God,' but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen."

But how are we imperfect people to obey what seems like a superhuman demand to love such "brothers"?

Try as we might to forgive, most of us know people that we can manage to "love" only in sense that we wish them no harm. Maybe we even pray for them. Is this sufficient?

While only God can judge, I take comfort in thinking of how many saints battled with other people, not always very charitably. In Scripture we hear Jesus reprimanding the apostles for squabbling over who is most important. They weren't exactly perfect either. I doubt that Jesus and St. John would have to admonish us so frequently to love each other if this were not THE major problem of human existence.

So we stumble along and do our best, knowing that God is loving and forgiving and understands our struggles and our weaknesses.

I probably should close by resolving to heal a broken relationship and in some cases this is both possible and wonderful. But in cases where reconciliation is impossible (where it might even be dangerous), we can turn the problem over to God and seek his mercy during this Year of Mercy.

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