

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Feb 20th 2016

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus instructs his disciples with one of the greatest (if not the greatest) commands: love your enemy. It is an imperative that is counterintuitive and borders on comical.

Love those who hate me? Pray for my persecutors? Love everyone at all times? Loving those who love and care for us seems appropriate, and it's typically easy to do, which is an added bonus. To love and care to our enemies is, speaking from experience, at times near to impossible.

I think today's Gospel is additionally challenging because in this age of globalization, "enemies" are readily created for us. Those of us who live in the United States are repeatedly told whom to hate, at times through covert and subliminal messaging: Mexicans, Muslims, etc. "Enemies" appear to abound and industries (U.S. prison system, ICE, etc.) are built around the maintenance of myths. Love or hate of "the enemy" has drastic consequences in our day-and-age.

In this passage from Matthew's Gospel, Jesus instructs his followers to "take the higher road," to look beyond divisions or past offenses and love the other. At first blush, this passage is challenging; however, Jesus' message also offers the promise of freedom — freedom to live as we are created to live, as human beings. As Jesus says, "that you may be children of your heavenly Father." He does not command us to be God, the heavenly Father; rather, Jesus liberates us with his words to be children (creatures) of God.

Jesus calls us to look upon people (including the self) as God does. Jesus encourages us to turn away from the human tendency to idolize the self and let God be the one to execute judgment on his creations. God is the one who causes the sun to rise and fall over the good and bad (v. 45). We were not created to leverage judgment upon the world; we were created for and out of love—that is our purpose. This passage is another reminder of our reason for being.

As we look toward the week to come, let us pray together to God and ask for help to set aside our tendency to judge others and ourselves and learn to walk in the way of offering love to everyone we encounter. Let us look for how we are complicit in systems that keep our "enemies" at bay and impact the lives of blood and flesh human beings. In doing so, we will become ever more so the people of God (Deuteronomy 26:19).

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