

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Jun 19th 2018

"You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.

But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

that you may be children of your heavenly Father."

Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

One of the reasons Jesus was killed is for saying things like this. Re-defining the meaning of "love" is at the heart of Jesus' mission. It is here that he will be most counter-cultural. The call of Jesus to love our enemies is contrary to our deepest instincts. It is contrary to our unconscious drive for self-preservation itself.

For the most part, we are followers of Jesus' way up to a point and then stop. This "Christianity-lite" can leave us still falling short of the "perfection" that describes what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

For Jesus, Love is what God does. It is impossible to profess closeness to God without being touched by God's love. What God shows us is that Love is not simply attraction or affection or even just self-sacrifice for those entrusted to our care. Love becomes dying-to-self love when it reaches out to forgive, to reconcile and to heal. That is how God loves us in Jesus. We love one another, even our enemies, because God loves us first.

A small examination of conscience might help us all today.

I can start by thanking God for loving me - for loving me over and over, even when I'm not very responsive, even when I've rejected his love and sinned.

Then I can ask myself - perhaps throughout the day - Do I love my enemies? Do I pray for those who persecute me? It shouldn't be very hard to come up with people that fall into this category: from people who bug me to people I simply can't stand. I should include people who really don't like me. Of course, anyone who has hurt me badly in the past should go on this list. And, I can even let myself consider "classes of people" I don't care too much for - the people who act or think differently from me.

Next, before I become terribly discouraged about ever being able to be Christian at all, if it means loving people on this list, I can simply and humbly ask our Lord for the grace he wants to give me to love these people the way he has loved me: with patience, compassion, healing and peace.

Now I can ask if there is a small "plan" that comes into my heart, about some person or people on my list of "enemies." Is there a gesture, an opportunity to "try again" or even a desire to pray for the person that comes to me? Can I imagine the Lord forgiving this person and inviting me to forgive as well? Perhaps I can spend some time reflecting upon this person's life journey and having compassion on him or her the way our Lord does.

Finally, as always, I can give thanks to God for the graces I receive, just by letting him open my heart to the power of Love to heal and bring peace.

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