



Welcome to our Eucharistic Celebration

The Seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time

February 19, 2017

Saint Mary of the Assumption Parish

Today's Scriptures

The Church teaches that every baptized Christian shares a call to holiness. Holiness is a gift of God and the vocation of every Christian. The foundation of these ideas can be found in today's challenging Scriptures.

The Book of Leviticus contains some of the oldest material in all of Scripture. Based on the teachings of the Ten Commandments, Leviticus contains various instructions for living and worshiping as God's chosen people. In this passage, God instructed Moses to assemble his people and announce to them that they are to be holy, as he himself is holy. In this context, holiness is not the same as perfection; rather, holiness was understood as something that set one apart, like God who is set apart from his creation. As his chosen people, the Israelites were to live in a way that set them apart from others. They were to follow God's Law but also to imitate him in their relationships with others. The Law should guide their conduct, but holiness demanded that they should act as God does--displaying compassion, mercy, forbearance, and forgiveness in all their dealings with others.

Last week, Jesus began to contrast the Law with his own teaching. Using several examples, Jesus quoted a well-known law, affirmed its importance, and then explained why he demanded more than mere compliance from his disciples. In his first four examples, Jesus taught his disciples how they were to relate to those closest to them, but in the two examples read today, Jesus focused on how his disciples were to relate to those outside the boundaries of family, friendship, and community. These are among Jesus' most difficult teachings. In the first, Jesus proposed that his disciples go far beyond the requirement of the law which limited the amount of revenge one could exact for an injury suffered, and not retaliate at all. In the second example, Jesus addressed the ancient norm that friends and neighbors were to be loved but enemies, hated. In the kingdom of God, evil will be confronted by kindness and love and no revenge will be sought for wrong done. Enemies and persecutors should be loved, even prayed for.

These were radical ideas that went far beyond compliance with Jewish Law. Jesus justified them by explaining that he was only asking his disciples to imitate their heavenly Father. God's love and favor did not depend on the "worthiness" of an individual, but on the dignity that God bestowed on each person he created. What would truly set Jesus' disciples apart would be the way that they loved, in imitation of the way that God loved everyone. St. Paul wrote that the Church, too, should display this same holiness. When Jesus taught that his disciples should be perfect as the Father is perfect, he was not demanding the impossible. Instead, he asked them to strive to attain a level of holiness that is possible when they allowed "their weakness to meet with the strength of the Father's grace." (Pope Francis 10/2/13).

Sunday Readings and Backgrounds

Reading I: Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18

To be like God is to be loving.

- Leviticus 19 is a collection of miscellaneous laws concerning conduct.
- Keeping the Ten Commandments, worshiping God, and living justly were prescribed.
- The reason for all the laws is to be like God.

Responsorial Psalm: Ps.103: 1-2, 3-4, 8, 10, 12-13.

The Lord is kind and merciful.

Reading II: 1 Corinthians 3:16-23

To love one another is to live.

- Wisdom had divided the community.
- Worldly wisdom is folly to God.
- Obey God and be like God. To be like God is to love one another.

Gospel: Matthew 5:38-48

Forgive and love to conquer evil.

- The Old Testament "an eye for an eye," was an attempt to limit evil.
- Monetary fines had become more common.
- Jesus advised that evil is conquered by good.

Reprinted with permission. LifelongCatechesis.OSV.com



"Some people were bothered by...'Be ye perfect.' Some people think this means 'unless you are perfect, I will not help you'; and as we cannot be perfect, then if He meant that, our position is hopeless. But I do not think He did mean that. I think he meant 'The only help I will give is help to become perfect. You may want something less: but I will give you nothing less.'" C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity, 1952.

Be Holy Like God

One day God told Moses to assemble the entire community of Israel for an important message. So Moses did as he was told and God said: “Be holy, for I, the Lord, your God, am holy.” What on earth did that mean? It seems redundant to call God holy; what else could God be? The people sought holiness by obeying God’s laws, but how could that make them holy like God? Did God obey the laws? God had no spouse or parent, nobody to whom to offer sacrifice, and all plants and animals belong to God so neither stealing nor jealousy can apply. How does one live so as to be holy like God?

Jesus issued essentially this same command at the end of today’s Gospel, except that Jesus used the word “perfect” instead of “holy.” It sounds like an impossible demand. How can we be like God? The minute we ask that question, we hear an echo of the first chapter of Genesis: “God created humankind in the divine image.” We must have some potential! Perhaps our major problem has been with our definition of holiness or godly perfection.

If we work backwards in today’s Gospel we hear about God’s unprejudiced treatment of the just and the unjust, those well-known for their goodness and those known for anything but love of God or others. The measure of God’s holiness or perfection seems to be the way God sends sun and rain to everybody. That must be what Jesus meant when he said: “Love your enemies that you may be children of your heavenly father.” And lest that be left simply as pious theory, he gave three practical, surprising and laughter-inducing examples of just what that looks like in practice.

Before we go to the examples, we need to explore the translation that says “offer no resistance to one who is evil.” When did Jesus let evil pass untrammelled? A better translation of that statement is “Do not react with hostility to one who is evil.” That’s an entirely different thing from not resisting evil. So the practical question is how to resist without hostility.

Jesus suggests that when somebody slaps you, you should turn the other cheek. The play in this bit of wisdom comes with the carefully chosen word “slap.” Jesus didn’t say “When your spouse beats you,” or “When the gang bullies you again,” instead, he said, “When somebody slaps you.” A slap is meant to demean rather than to draw blood. A slap doesn’t invite a fist fight; it’s a put-down, a power play in the

in the social hierarchy. Note too that the slap Matthew portrays was backhanded (right hand to right cheek). Jesus was describing something intended to put the victim in his or her place rather than to incapacitate her or him. Turning the other cheek changed the game by having the victim say, “Hit me with integrity and then we’ll see.” Surely a few of the audience gasped as they pictured a browbeaten servant finally standing up like that to an arrogant overlord.

So too with walking the extra mile. A Roman soldier could force a local resident to carry his pack, but for only one mile. The offer to go a second mile robbed the uniformed bully of the initiative and put him in danger of being reported for going beyond the limits. By now Jesus’ audience was beginning to chuckle at the image of a Roman soldier pleading to get his pack back from a clever, audacious, pacifist rebel.

In the third example the power imbalance was economic. A poor person had borrowed money and all he had as collateral was his tunic, the outer garment that also served as his blanket at night. If the lender wanted to refuse to return the tunic until the loan was paid, he could get a group of collaborators to make the judgment on his behalf. The poor debtor then had no recourse except to make a prophetic point of the absolutely unadorned fact that such a law left some naked while others ended up possessing a grimy inner garment — laundry they didn’t need and hardly wanted to touch.

What does God’s holiness look like? It looks like a never-ending outreach to rebellious humanity, an ongoing invitation to communion, the incarnation of love, no matter the cost. It looks like a person who approaches an oppressor with an attitude that says “You, no *we* can be better than that!” It looks like Oscar Romero and Dorothy Day, Mother Theresa and the little kid who forgives his brother who when tackled got his leg broken.

Moses said “Be holy!” Jesus said “Be perfect,” and with his stories he taught that it is not only possible, but a lot more fun than other options.

Mary McGlone, Reprinted with permission. Celebration Magazine, February 19, 2017