

“Destroy not the enemies but the feeling of enmity”

Lectio Divina of the 7th Ordinary Sunday (Cycle A)

Lev 19:1-2,17-18 1 Cor 3:16-23 Mt 5:38-48

Opening Prayer: Heavenly Father, Your Word commands us to, “be holy as You are holy”, and we know that in and of ourselves, we cannot live in true holiness of heart without the presence of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Bless us that our nature and character become part of Jesus’ nature and character by dying to old self and living a transformed life. We ask that You would continue to root out all unwanted and unchristian beliefs and practices in our lives. We pray that You would transform us into the image and likeness of our Lord Jesus, day by day. This we ask in Jesus’ name.

First Reading: A reading from the book of Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18 The LORD said to Moses, “Speak to the whole Israelite community and tell them: Be holy, for I, the LORD, your God, am holy. “You shall not bear hatred for your brother or sister in your heart. Though you may have to reprove your fellow citizen, do not incur sin because of him. Take no revenge and cherish no grudge against any of your people. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.” (**The word of the Lord/ Thanks be to God**)

Commentary: The first reading gives the Holiness code: “**Be holy, for I the Lord, your God, am Holy.**” The Israelites were expected not only adore, revere, and love Him, but also to share His Holiness by living holy life. God’s holiness consists of His unconditional and magnanimous love, care, concern, mercy, and forgiveness towards every human being. Therefore, in order to be holy, we have to be kind, loving, merciful, forgiving, and compassionate toward our neighbors – and this is what God wants us to be when He calls each one of us to be holy, to be spiritually perfect.

Responsorial Psalm 103 R. *The Lord is kind and merciful.*

Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all my being, bless his holy name.

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.

R. *The Lord is kind and merciful.*

He pardons all your iniquities, heals all your ills.

He redeems your life from destruction, crowns you

with kindness and compassion. ***R. The Lord is kind and merciful.***

Merciful and gracious is the LORD, slow to anger and abounding in kindness.
Not according to our sins does he deal with us,
nor does he requite us according to our crimes.

R. The Lord is kind and merciful.

As far as the east is from the west, so far has he put our transgressions from us.
As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion
on those who fear him.

R. The Lord is kind and merciful.

Second Reading: A reading from the first letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians

3:16-23 Brothers and sisters: Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for the temple of God, which you are, is holy. Let no one deceive himself. If any one among you considers himself wise in this age, let him become a fool, so as to become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in the eyes of God, for it is written: God catches the wise in their own ruses, and again: The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain. So let no one boast about human beings, for everything belongs to you, Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or the present or the future: all belong to you, and you to Christ, and Christ to God. **(The word of the Lord / Thanks be to God)**

Commentary: St. Paul gives us an additional reason to be holy. We are to keep our bodies holy because we are the temples of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit lives in us. St. Paul teaches us that the presence of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us makes our community and each of its members a holy temple. Just as our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit, the local church or the Christian community is holy. The church is not to be spoiled or ruined by divisions, controversy or other sins as members comes together to worship God.

Gospel Reading: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

5:38-48: Jesus said to his disciples: "You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one as well. If anyone wants to go to law with you over your tunic, hand over your cloak as well. Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go for two miles. Give to the one who asks of you, and do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow. "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, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same? So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (**The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ/Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ**)

Meditation on the Gospel: We are living in a very civilized culture. We have rules and regulations to follow and the constitution guarantees safety and protection for the citizens. We know what is right and what is wrong. But in the olden days, the people did not have any ethics. They had the jungle law. As the animals behaved, the humans also behaved. The Canaanites, the Egyptians and the Babylonians had the law of retaliation. For example: if one slaps once, you slap twice, if he slaps three, you slap four and thus they took pride in proving one’s strength. The fight continues until the weak party dies. The Israelites, although they were godly people, still followed this jungle law as they were living amongst them. But Jesus replaces this law of retaliation with his law of love and forbearance: “If anyone hits you on the right cheek, offer him the other as well; if someone wishes to go to law with you to get your tunic; let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone requires you to go one mile, go two miles with him.” (Mt 5:39-41). Definitely what Jesus teaches is quiet demanding but he has actualized what he taught by praying from the cross, “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do”.

Human Dignity and Divinity: In practice, the law of punishment is an acceptable strategy and quite logical and well justified and the law of love often seems unacceptable, ideal and illogical. We cannot avoid the following questions: How can I allow the other person to take advantage of me? How can I lose my respect and dignity to my enemy? Why should I be a loser if I have the courage to fight back? All these questions linger in our mind and make us conclude that we are losing our human dignity. But the truth is contrary. God restores our human dignity and we share in his divinity when we conform to His Divinity. We all share His image and likeness.

What is Christian response to retaliation? President Abraham Lincoln spoke kindly of his enemies and his friend said, “You must destroy them with your power”. Lincoln said, “I destroy them by making them my friends”. He destroyed the feeling of enmity and not his enemies. Jesus wants us to repay evil with goodness, kindness, forgiveness and reconciliation. Retaliation and vengeance has no place in our Christian life. We have to gracefully forgive the insult and convert the offender.

What is Christian ethics in our personal relationships? We must love our neighbors and forgive our enemies and pray for those who persecute us and thus we demonstrate that we are children of a merciful heavenly Father. A Christian has no personal enemies. If we only love our friends, we are no different from pagans or atheists. The Greek word used for loving enemies is **agápe**, manifesting benevolence and good will for the other person with God's help. **Agápe** love is a choice more than a feeling. We choose to love as Jesus loves them like St. Stephen, the first martyr, who prayed for those who were putting him to death. Thus we become holy and perfect people as our heavenly father.

Concluding prayer: Heavenly Father, You are a holy God and we desire to be holy like you. Bless us that we live our lives in a manner that is worthy of you and pleasing to you. May we desire to stand in your presence always with clean hands and pure heart. Purify our heart, cleanse our inner thoughts and examine the very motives behind our acts and attitudes, for we desire to live in holiness of heart. Send the Holy Spirit upon us for where there is Holy Spirit, there is freedom. O Holy Spirit, Breathe in us, O Holy Spirit, that our thoughts may all be holy. Act in us, O Holy Spirit, that our work, too, may be holy. Draw our heart, O Holy Spirit, that we love only what is holy. Strengthen us, O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy. Guard us, O Holy Spirit, so that I may always be holy. Amen (Hail Mary/ Glory)