

7th Sunday in Ordinary Time: Be Holy As Your Heavenly Father is Holy

Leviticus 19:1-2,17-18; Psalm 103:1-2,3-4,8,10,12-13; 1 Corinthians 3:16-23; Matthew 5:38-48

Dear CCST family and friends,

It is always comforting to know that “the Lord is kind and merciful” (Ps 103:8). But I confess that there are several selfish questions inside me every time I ponder the command of our Lord, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father" (Matt 5:44-45).

These questions are: "Does Jesus mean it that way, or maybe he gives exceptions for some occasions to get even?" How can I love my enemies and pray for those who persecute me when I even react with simple provocation or avoid the person I don't like to see? How can I love and pray for my enemies when I sometimes turn my eyes away from unlovable ones and those I don't get along with? How can I love and pray for my enemies when I am inclined to hold grudges and hold off forgiveness to members of my family? Isn't it difficult to let go of one's desire to get even? Am I inclined to keep my bitterness and point my accusing fingers at others who offended me?

Honestly, I was appalled by this selfish questioning and even accused myself that I could only be a child of the heavenly Father in name, not in truth. I was also wondering if maybe only my mouth can reach Heaven while the rest of my body languishes in hell but thank God's mercy, there is purgatory, and the fire of his love will purify my soul.

What I am trying to say is that Jesus' command is demanding and goes against what we think is normal. "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father." The enemies here are not just the ones who don't like us or whom we don't like but those who persecute us.

Do you love your enemies? Do you pray for those who insulted you? How do you deal with your enemies on Facebook? Maybe you would delete those you don't get along with, block or unfriend your detractors rather than keep them.

But how would we fulfill the teachings of Jesus? If we disobey them, we deny ourselves to become children of the Heavenly Father. If we ignore his teachings, it is equivalent to taking off our dignity as children of God. To love and to pray for our enemies is the Lord's toll order to all his followers! Only then will his followers genuinely become children of the Heavenly Father!

Jesus wants us to ascend into who we are, children of the heavenly Father. The practiced and accepted law he mentioned, "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," is a principle of justice that requires equal punishment for the offense committed. But he wants us to go beyond what the law expects. Even if it is acceptable or the law states that it is legitimate to hate one's enemy, he commands us to choose to love rather than hate. From the beginning of his command, he argues, "I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil." And he added the famous and challenging words: "When someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one as well." "If someone asks you for something, go and do something extra."

Our Lord Jesus advocates moral righteousness higher than the Old Covenant. Just as Israel was to imitate God in being holy (cf. Lev 19:2), Jesus calls each of us to imitate God's perfect compassion (cf. Lk 6:36). Because God is kind and merciful to the just and unjust, his children, all of us, must extend mercy even to the enemies. St. Paul tells us that if we strive to love the way God loves, we move toward divine wisdom and get out worldly human wisdom. He wants to be aware of the foolishness of the world that focus on getting even, getting ahead, and outsmarting others (cf 1 Cor 3:18-19). There is more to this than what meets the eye. We are the temples of God, and we must allow the Holy Spirit dwelling in us to shine, to ascend towards Heaven!

Of course, we cannot do this by ourselves. Relying merely on our ability and strength, we will not be able to imitate our Heavenly Father's love for us.

First, pray, pray, and pray. Our enemy is more than just the physical person, but the evil spirit influencing the situation who works to sow discord and destroy our sanity. Don't be like a firecracker that reacts immediately to fire, but pray, pray, pray! Incessant prayer is the language of the Children of God.

Second, we can only love as much as we allow ourselves to be loved by God. Allow God's love that descends on us ascends by always choosing for it in all circumstances. God's love for each of us helps us rise beyond the mediocrity of loving.

Third, to desire the desire of Jesus to be holy as the Heavenly Father is holy. Holiness is found in each of us; hence we are the temples of God, and his spirit dwells in us (cf 1 Cor 3:16). It is what we receive through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. Unfortunately, sin prevents this holiness from revealing itself in our lives. We must strive to overcome everything that prevents us from being holy and removes us from God's perfect holiness through going to regular Confession.

Fourth, to gaze upon the cross of Jesus, who sacrifices himself for us and continues to love and save us even though we sin several times. We should be disturbed if we ask his forgiveness and keep his love to ourselves, like antique collectors happy to have but unwilling to give away. It is needful to humbly beg Jesus to be with us in loving and praying for our enemies.

All these must be our daily bread to eat and relish without growing weary because our dignity and call to be holy children of the Heavenly Father are at stake. He is kind and merciful, and so we are to all.

God bless you.

Fr. Manny Hewe
Pastor