



February 20, 2011

The Seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time

My Command to you is: love your enemies and pray for your persecutors. This will prove you are children of your heavenly Father... Matthew 5:44-45

Dear Friends;

Poet and writer, Oscar Wilde once quipped *"Always forgive your enemies. Nothing annoys them more."* I once had a spiritual director say to me *"You should pray that God makes your enemies saints. God always tries his saints. So you are praying the best for them but at the same time gain some satisfaction without doing them ill."* While these may be first steps Jesus demands more of us.

This week Jesus continues his teaching on the mount. He has told us of those who are blessed or fortunate—the poor, the hungry for justice and the persecuted. He calls his followers to be "salt and light." He last week told us that the community of his followers must squelch the tendency to feud among themselves. And this week he calls us to reflect the holiness of God.

In the Jewish sense of the word, holiness is to be "set-apart" for service to God—much like the sacred vessels in the Temple were set apart for worship. In the Jewish and Christian Traditions humans are fashioned in the likeness of God. God's Spirit dwells within. Christians would see themselves (as Paul would say) as earthen vessels or temples of the Holy Spirit through whom God acts.

In light of this, to be holy is to be transparent. It is to live in such a way that the light and presence of God is apparent to all. This means that we are called to the radical unconditional love that God has for each of us. Holiness is not rooted ultimately in what I do or do not do. Holiness is rooted in the conviction that, as St Augustine says, "God loves me as if I were the only one."

Holiness flows from that conviction. The holy person loves the other regardless of who they are as if they were the only one. This is the perfection of God to which we are called. That love includes those we label as enemies.

There have been many great saints who have acted on such love—through acts of forgiveness, non-violence and charity. One such saint Mohandas (Mahatma) Gandhi wrote shortly before his assassination: "Have I the non-violence of the brave in me? My death alone will show that. If someone killed me and I died with a prayer for the assassin on my lips and God's remembrance and consciousness of his living presence in the sanctuary of my heart, only then would I be said to have the nonviolence of the brave."

Not long after that, Gandhi (a Hindu) was assassinated by a Hindu man who resented Gandhi's tolerance of Muslims. Gandhi was on his way to evening prayer. The man approached Gandhi and shot him three times. Gandhi died praying for the man saying *"Rama, rama, rama"* (I forgive you, I love you, I bless you.)

Gandhi a Hindu embodied the call of Jesus to love our enemies. Can we as Christians do the same? Our love, forgiveness and nonviolence should set us apart. And it is in these we become perfect as God.

Peace,

Fr Ron