

Cycle A 7th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1 LV 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 you people. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD."

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

R. (8a) 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.

Reading 2 1 COR 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 anyone 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.

Gospel MT 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."

When Jesus declared “*You have heard it said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy*”, He was not quoting the Jewish prophets from any of the writings found in the Old Testament, The command to hate your enemy is found nowhere in the Bible. He was quoting something from outside of the Jewish religion. Ancient legal systems prescribed punishments equal to the offenses. A common expression was: “*an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.*”

In today’s Gospel Jesus instructs His disciples to go beyond, to follow a higher law, a law not based on retaliation and retribution but based rather on a more powerful force to govern our human relationships – the Law of Love. We must be careful, however, to note that Jesus is not instructing His followers to let evildoers do whatever they please. To do nothing to confront evil is not the response Jesus wants from us. Christians must resist evil when it is encountered, but with a resistance to nonviolently break the cycle of violence. In the ancient laws of retribution violence was to be countered by violence of equal proportion. Jesus confronts evil with a power that transcends violence...God’s nonviolent love!

In Jesus’ teaching He went on to give His disciples the example of the debtor who, while standing before the judge, stripped off his cloak and his tunic and stood naked before this creditor who had dragged him into court demanding full repayment. In his shock, the creditor was covered with shame.

Nonviolent love is a powerful force that destabilizes and confounds the ways of the world. The norms of the world demand retribution and violent repression through the strict application of raw power, power that in many cases is falsely justified under the force of unjust laws. One cannot help but be reminded of the great nonviolent strategies and tactics pushing back on evil of Mahatma Gandhi, Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, and the Dali Lama, to name a few. Have you seen the Netflix documentary Mission: Joy? It’s a deeply moving and very funny masterclass on how to create joy in our troubled world as two Nobel Peace Prize winners have done. These unlikely friends, Archbishop Desmond Tutu the Christian activist who helped dismantle apartheid in South Africa, and the Dali Lama, the Buddhist activist who has lived in exile since 1959. They have a remarkably joy filled story for us.

So you see God's love has no bounds. His love extends of all of His creation, particularly to human beings. He has made every human being in His image and likeness. The God of love cannot hate. People talk about being judged by a wrathful God, but maybe we should say at the very least that nothing God does supports evil or our sinful human deeds. Jesus' formula for overcoming evil does not include using evil. After all, using evil to overcome evil would only multiply evil, it would not divide it or reduce it to zero. Echoing God's boundless love, Jesus dying on His Cross cries out: "*Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.*" With His dying breath Jesus extends His loving forgiveness to those who have inflicted terrible evil upon Him. He is not a "wrathful God" who we need to fear!!

Non-violent love undermines hatred; it breaks the cycle of violence and tears down boundaries that bind us up in hatred. If there is to be judgement and retribution, let God hand it out on His terms. We are to be agents of God's love, never God's wrath. God is ever new, ever creating, and ever present IN us, and THROUGH us, and AS us, in real time. God filling us as God, is our source of love. We are to be agents of God's boundless, nonviolent love...sometimes in great ways, but mostly in small ways...a love that brings light out of darkness, meaning out of absurdity, and life out of death. God is the only One who can overcome evil and His ways can only be our ways, of course, when we walk in the footsteps of Jesus.

So maybe a better response to family feuds and conflicted relationships, would be for us to figure out a loving initiative...to be the first to offer reconciliation or some other gesture of love. I gently pushed and prodded my sisters Lynne and Gail to reconcile after decades of accusations and hurt feelings...And believe me, when they reconciled a mere few weeks before Lynne's death, it was truly one of the greatest joys of their lives...and mine! And, that only happened because God is in our lives!