

The Paper Pulpit

(Reflections from the Pastor)

7th Sunday in Ordinary Time

If someone insults you or tries to take advantage of you, how do you respond? Do you repay in kindness? Jesus approached the question of just retribution with a surprising revelation of God's intention for how we should treat others, especially those who mistreat us. When Jesus spoke about God's law, he did something no one had done before. He gave a new standard based not just on the requirements of justice – giving each their due – but based on the law of grace and love. Jesus knew the law and its intention better than any jurist or legal expert could imagine. He quoted from the oldest recorded law in the world: *If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe* (Exodus 21:23-25). Such a law today seems cruel, but it was meant to limit vengeance as a first step towards mercy. This law was not normally taken literally but served as a guide for a judge in a law court for assessing punishment and penalty (see Deuteronomy 19:18). The Old Testament is full of references to the command that we must be merciful: *You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD* (Leviticus 19:18). *If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink* (Proverbs 25:21). *Do not say, "I will do to him as he has done to me; I will pay the man back for what he has done"* (Proverbs 24:29). *Let him give his cheek to the smiter, and be filled with insults* (Lamentations 3:30).

Jesus does something quite remarkable and unheard of. He transforms the law of mercy with grace and loving-kindness. Jesus also makes clear that there is no room for retaliation. We must not only avoid returning evil for evil, but we must seek the good of those who wish us ill. Do you accept insults, as Jesus did, with no resentment or malice? When you are compelled by others to do more than you think you deserve, do you insist on your rights, or do you respond with grace and cheerfulness?

What makes Christians different from others and what makes Christianity distinct from any other religion? It is *grace* – treating others, not as they deserve, but as God wishes them to be treated – with loving-kindness and mercy. God is good to the unjust as well as the just. His love embraces saint and sinner alike. God seeks our highest good and teaches us to seek the greatest good of others, even those who hate and abuse us. Our love for others, even those who are ungrateful and selfish towards us, must be marked by the same kindness and mercy which God has shown to us. It is easier to show kindness and mercy when we can expect to benefit from doing so. How much harder when we can expect nothing in return. Our prayer for those who do us ill both breaks the power of revenge and releases the power of love to do good in the face of evil. How can we possibly love those who cause us harm or ill-will? With God all things are possible. He gives power and grace to those who believe and accept the gift of the Holy Spirit. His love conquers all, even our hurts, fears, prejudices and griefs. Only the cross of Jesus Christ can free us from the tyranny of malice, hatred, revenge, and resentment and gives us the courage to return evil with good. Such love and grace has power to heal and to save from destruction. Do you know the power of Christ's redeeming love and mercy?

God gives us every good gift in Jesus Christ so that we may not lack anything we need to do his will and to live as his sons and daughters (2 Peter 1:3). He knows our weakness and sinfulness better than we do. And he assures us of his love, mercy, and grace to follow in his ways. Do you want to grow in your love for God and for your neighbor? Ask the Holy Spirit to change and transform you in the image of the Father that you may walk in the joy and freedom of the gospel.

Diocesan Annual Appeal: Thank you to those who already made their pledge. In order to help us make our goal, three donors will pay up to \$4,500 if they are matched by new dollars (for a total of \$9,000) received from now until the end of March. There is no pledge too big or too small.

For those who have never pledged before there has never been a better time. I am really encouraging new/first time givers. We need everyone's (not almost everybody's) help. If you can only afford \$20 that is great and will be matched to become \$40. A \$50 donation will become \$100. The key is to have everyone pledge. For those who already made a pledge and want to take advantage of this offer, why not do so right now. Your additional pledge will also be matched.

When we go over our goal, 100% of the money comes back to the parish.

Please contact me directly if you have any questions or would like to make a pledge or make an additional pledge. It would be greatly appreciated. Additional pledge cards are available in the parish office or at the edge of your pews. Don't wait.

Bible Study: Just a reminder there will be no Tuesday evening Mass or Bible Study on February 18th and 25th. Bible Studies to resume on March 4th.

Sincerely In Christ, Fr. Jim Trempe