

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

The preacher's Sunday sermon was, "Forgive Your Enemies." He asked, "How many have forgiven their enemies?" About half held up their hands. He then repeated the question. This time about eighty percent held up their hands. He then repeated his question a third time. The entire congregation held up their hands except one elderly lady. "Mrs. Jones," the preacher asked, "Aren't you willing to forgive your enemies?" "I don't have any" she replied. "That is very unusual", the preacher said. "How old are you?" "Ninety-three." "Mrs. Jones, please come to the front and tell the congregation how a person cannot have an enemy in the world." The little sweetheart of a lady tottered down the aisle and said: "It's easy; I just outlived all of them!"

Dear Friends,

We continue to reflect on the Sermon on the Plain. Today Jesus talks about three important things of our faith journey. Both the first and second reading supports it with good examples to help us walk through.

Responding in love to enemies and opponents: In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus quoted the Mosaic Law and brought the new teaching. Here Jesus talks about challenges in daily life. Jesus didn't talk about sentimental love. This is more of an ethical standard. Sentimental love could be with our loved ones and neighbors. But Jesus asks us to love the enemies and do good for them. The first reading becomes the perfect example as David leaves Saul on an ethical standard. Even though he had an opportunity to retaliate, he did not do it, because he was the anointed one. There is another good example we know is Pope Saint John Paul II, who loved his enemy and forgave him. It is hard and challenging. but doable.

The second point added to that is the golden rule. We need to do to others what we would like to receive from others. We, as humans, have the tendency to share with whom we love or know. It is quite a natural instinct. Jesus tells us to go beyond our natural instinct and desire good things for others. You all know the story of Johnny Appleseed.

Mother Teresa said, "Love means to be willing to give until it hurts." She believed that when we give up something to help others, we are "giving until it hurts". We heard this story that Mother Theresa politely approached a wealthy man and asked for help. At the peak of anger, the rich man spit on Mother Theresa's face and started scolding her. The divine Mother patiently cleared it and with unimaginable patience asked him, "Thanks for whatever you gave me, but what will you give to help my poor people?"

These commands go against our human instincts. It is natural to love those who love us and to retaliate against those who harm us. But Jesus calls us to something greater—to love with the same love that God has for us.

This kind of love is not about emotions but about choices and actions. It is a love that forgives, that gives without expecting anything in return, that seeks the good of the other even when it is undeserved.

In our daily lives, we encounter people who hurt us - family members, colleagues, strangers. How do we respond? Do we hold grudges, seek revenge, or do we follow Jesus' example of mercy?

I challenge you this week to let go of a past hurt and maybe seek some reconciliation in your life. What a good way to start your preparations for the upcoming Lenten season.