

February 19, 2023

Cycle A – 7th Sunday of Ordinary Time

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

Notes from Bishop Peter

HOW CAN WE DO WHAT JESUS IS ASKING? THE ANSWER, THE HOLY SPIRIT!

1. “Brothers and sisters: Do you not know that you are the Temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (I Corinthians 3:17)
 - a. Paul’s readers think of the temple of their goddess-protector Aphrodite (Roman name Venus), the goddess of love, beauty and fertility and protector of sailors. (Since Corinth was a port city)
 - b. How shocking to realize that each one of Paul’s Corinthian converts is a temple, not of a goddess but of the Holy Spirit! And so are we!
 - c. The Spirit, however, is not simply there. The Spirit is and continues to be active in the lives of believers. Thus we can count on the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit to carry out Jesus’ commands, even difficult ones such as those in today’s Gospel reading.
2. What is Jesus talking about? First, the saying, “An eye for an eye...” This is the Lex (or law) Talionis – we get retaliation from that. Goes back to the Law of Hammurabi (died in 1750 B.C.) of Babylon. Its purpose was to limit reaction to injuries and only a judge could give the offended party permission to carry it out. In the Jewish world it was reduced to financial compensation.
3. Jesus then gives us three points:
 - a. “When someone strikes you on the right cheek...” Since most people are right-handed (I am not), how does that person strike another on the right cheek? Try it out on a friend. The only way is backhanded, meaning insults. The disciple of Jesus doesn’t hold grudges, doesn’t brood over injuries. Doing so can move us to do harm to others like Herodias, Herod’s wife, who had Saint John the Baptist decapitated because he told Herod it was unlawful to take his brother’s ex-wife.

- This approach inspired Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Junior to take the path of non-violent resistance. Like Jesus, they advocated absorbing evil as did Jesus throughout his life. No retaliation. “Vengeance is mine, says the Lord.” (Romans 12:19)
- b. Tunic and cloak: The Jew had the right to get his cloak back by nighttime because he slept in it. The point: Insisting on one’s RIGHTS to the detriment of the common good. Example: The right, according to Roe. v Wade before it was nullified to an abortion at any time during pregnancy. Thus opposition to anything that would infringe on that right. Another common example: My right to refuse vaccination for myself and my children but what about the common good? **good?**
 - c. Press into service to go one mile... The Roman soldiers often did this to the Jews and others under their domination. Jesus’ point: Humble service as did Jesus when he washed the feet of the Apostles at the Last Supper. That’s the origin of the expression, “To go the extra mile.” For example, generous people who are busy but serve on boards and parish pastoral council and my friend Debby and her mission trips with the teens of her parish!
 - d. Love your enemies: In Greek, four words to express love – for family, between husband and wife, brotherly love (philia) and agape = rejects bitterness and wishes the offender “unconquerable benevolence” as one writer puts it. Example: My priest friend speaking with a communist in France: No matter what you do to me, I have to try and love you, that is, to reject resentment, wishing only good for you and not harm.
 - e. Pray for those who persecute you: Bishop Francis Komarica of Bosnia during the war initiated by Serbia in April of 1992 who asked his men and women in separate concentration camps to pray one Hail Mary a day for their Serbian captors. This changed the tenor of the camps in just one week. You can’t pray for someone and hate him at the same time.
4. In struggling to obey Jesus, we become progressively perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect. Better still, St. Luke in his gospel says, “Be merciful as your Father is merciful.” Thus to be perfect is to be merciful. May Jesus help us to reach these lofty goals that are essential to our well-being and that of society.

Amen.