

Homily of Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A, 2023

Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18; Psalm 103:1-4, 8, 10, 12-13; 1 Corinthians 3:16-23; Matthew 5:38-48

First reading: Israelite community was instructed, "Be holy, for I the Lord, your God, am holy." Second reading: St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "Brothers and sisters: Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" Gospel reading: Jesus said to his disciples: "So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect."

St. Paul says, "There is no righteous one, not even one ..." (Romans 3:10). "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God..." (Romans 3:23). How, then, can we be perfect and holy as God? How, then, can we, sinners, become a dwelling place of the Spirit of God? Although we are all sinners, the readings invite us to draw from God's holiness (goodness and mercy) and share with others the goodness and mercy we have drawn from God. We draw from God's goodness and mercy through this Mass we are celebrating, through the word of God we hear, through our prayers, and through the Holy Communion we receive. The fruit of all these is that we become communicators, dispensers, and reflectors of God's goodness and mercy to others.

The first reading states, "You shall not bear hatred for your brother in your heart." If we have drawn from God's holiness, we will not have hate in us. 1 John 3:9 says, "no one who is begotten by God commits sin, because God's seed remains in him." Jesus encouraged us last Sunday, "Go first and reconcile with your brother/sister, and then come to offer your gift;" for God detests the gift of the angry person and the unforgiving person (Proverbs 15:8). 1 John 3:15 tells us, "Everyone who hates a brother or a sister is a murderer." The first reading continues, "Take no revenge and cherish no grudges against any of your people." St. Paul advises us, "Beloved, do not look for revenge but leave room for the wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord'" (Romans 12:19).

In today's gospel, Jesus nullifies the Mosaic Law that permitted a protective and proportional retaliation or punishment on an offender, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" (Exodus 21:24). Rather, Jesus tells us to offer no resistance to an evil person, to turn the other cheek, to hand over one's cloak, and to go the extra mile (Matthew 5:38-41).

Sometimes, we have a hard time understanding this radical teaching of Jesus. The following suggestions may help: (1) We are to take the path of peace and reconciliation. (2) We are not to take the path of revenge and retaliation by repaying evil with evil, but treat those who hate us kindly. (3) We are to forgive our offenders. (4) We are to pray for our offenders.

If we are unable to do these, we are no different from 'tax collectors' and 'pagans' (ungodly people).

How can we apply "offer no resistance to one who is evil" to practical life? If a dangerous armed robber who is ready to kill me demands, "Your wallet or your life!" I should be wise enough to choose life over wallet.

It is very challenging to live out the radical teachings of Jesus in our world infested with dishonesty, corruption, oppression and violence, and where bad people do every imaginable and unimaginable evil to get what they want. Does Jesus teach his followers to succumb and submit to forces of evil and evil people in the name of love, peace, reconciliation, forgiveness, and prayer? No!

St. Paul assures us that we are the temples of God and the Spirit of God dwells in us (1 Corinthians 3:16). The Spirit of God in us is not "a spirit of fear, but one of power, love and sound judgement" (2 Timothy 1:7). It is based on the sound judgement that the Catholic Church states in Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 79, "As long as the danger of war persists and there is no international authority with necessary competence and power, governments cannot be denied the right of lawful self-defense, once all peace efforts have failed." Based on lawful self-defense Jesus says, "One who does not have a sword should sell his cloak and buy one" (Luke 22:36). Has Ukraine the right to defend herself against Russia's invasion and atrocities? Yes!

Lawful self-defense and sound judgement played out in this news item:

In 2020, a man started shooting into a church congregation in Texas. Within seconds, a volunteer security guard returned fire and killed the gunman. The gunman had already shot two congregants, who died. There were more than 250 people in the church that day. Many credit the security guard for saving many lives. A grand jury declined to indict the security guard because he took out the threat that was endangering other lives, which he did responsibly and justified under Texas law. The security guard was, later, awarded a medal of courage by the state governor.

While we obey Jesus' commandments of not resisting the evil person, turning the other cheek, offering our cloak, and going the extra mile, we must, also, be able to contend with the world infested with evil. Jesus says, "Behold, I am sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and simple as doves" (Matthew 10:16).

O Lord, we need your grace in every step of the way. O Lord, we need your grace to become communicators and reflectors of your goodness and mercy. O Lord, without your grace, we can do nothing. Amen.

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