

7th Sunday of Ordinary Time – Cycle A

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time Lectionary: 79

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 your 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 any one 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,

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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.”

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The readings for today certainly do go against society as much when they were written as today when they are read. They are very “counter-cultural” to use an old expression. What we hear today in the ordinary time of the Church year is to understand what it means to be holy in specific settings. Today’s lesson is part of the work of the people of God to answer the “Universal Call to Holiness”.

In the first reading we hear from Leviticus and with some contemplation, one can see its value in living this life of today’s Christian. We hear early on the Lord’s command to “be holy” is for “the whole Israelite community.” Every Jew, and us, was and is called to holiness. We also hear that they and we are to, “Be holy, for I, the Lord, your God, am holy.” Quite simply we should be holy because God of Father is holy. We need to be like God and imitate our Creator because we are told in Genesis we human beings are “made in the image and likeness of God”. This means there is something in God’s nature that is also in our human nature. Also, God would not demand we be like Him if it were not possible.

So, we have Scripture and the Spirit to enlighten us today. One of the dimensions of being made in the image and likeness of God is our potential for holiness and selflessness. Part of holiness is to “Love your neighbor as yourself.” This may mean to reprove evil-doing as necessary, but never to bear a grudge, to hate, or to take revenge, because that would be sinning and then we would be like them, not like God. In God’s gradual revelation to humanity, he first taught the Chosen People that the object of this love was one’s fellow Jew (“brother or sister,” “fellow citizen,” “your people,” “your neighbor”). Later, Christ builds on this and emphasizes that “neighbor” is every human person. So, the call to holiness is universal: everyone is to love everyone. But even here we get more specific lessons as to who is to be loved by us and how in the Gospel reading.

Before we get to that however, Psalm 103 which we chanted this morning, seems to offer us another mental puzzle as to the “why” of loving selflessly. What does this “fear of God” mean? Are we to see God as a vindictive slave master? No, to fear God means to look at not displeasing him the way a good son or daughter looks at not displeasing a good father or mother. Much more than the fear of punishment is the fear of displeasing someone so good. God has revealed his kindness and mercy fully through the redemption which His Son has won for us in his victory over the devil, sin, and death. In Christ, God forgives our sins and promises us healing of all our ills, even to eternal life, and complete happiness. It is a huge error to think that the Lord looks at us the way we look at our enemies, with suspicion, ready to pay back their evil to us. Rather, he looks at us with the compassion of a good father, forgetting our sins and offering us only good things. This Psalm tells us of the measure of perfection Christ asks us to bring to our relationships – basically to not judge, but to love selflessly.

In St Paul’s letter 1 Corinthians, on the surface it may seem to be somewhat confusing but again with a little contemplation we can see it too helps us to understand what “being holy” is about. It may seem confusing to say “we are just holy”. Does everything belong to us? Does everything belong to everyone? The point we can take away from Paul’s letter is that paradise and only paradise is the secure possession of everything good. All human beings desire this. Even here in St. Paul’s outrageous claim that “everything belongs to you.” But the “wisdom of this world” is to attempt to create and to hold on to one’s own paradise, which is futile. To make yourself a gift to others looks like foolishness to “wise” and powerful human beings of the world. “How can you possibly gain by giving?” the ‘wise of the world’ wonder.” Both the paradise we desire and the holiness we are called to, are gifts God gives us. Gifts we are given to share. Gifts like Monopoly money to play the game with. And as in every game we play we want security. But the security we want can only exist if we are simply holy to one another.

Innocence in our innermost being understands this. I saw a presentation once by an economist who was perplexed by his children playing the game of Monopoly. The four of them from all ages would play the game to maximize how long all of them played the game and how much real estate all of them could accumulate with no

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thought of who would win the game and they even needed to bend the rules once in a while by loaning money to those who needed it! When asked why they made the economic sub optimum decisions, all of them said they wanted everyone to play the game as long as they could because that was what was fun. In other words, for these innocent children, justice and the rules were only an opportunity to practice self-giving – not winning the game. It took me by surprise, that the father then changed the rules of the game to see what the children would do. He said from then on, whoever won the game would get \$5 in real money. Instantly the game became a quest to win and the younger less experienced siblings were no longer assisted by the older ones and there was much less enthusiasm for the game. Besides the unconscionable behavior of the father to not revel in the children's innocence he had to corrupt them by buying their self-less love for each other with worldly gain. When he stopped the bribes, the children all went back to their old way of playing and their laughter and enjoyment returned!

In the gospel reading we hear today, Jesus again confirms, and expands the Ten Commandments as he “fulfills” the Law not abolish it. Underneath the commandments, just as underneath the natural moral law, is justice. It seems this was immediately corrupted by humanity to mean we only needed to do what was the minimum in giving everyone what is their due. Specifically, most people only saw in the Ten Commandments, that the first three pertain to us giving God what we owe Him, and the final seven regard us giving other human beings what we owe them. But, and this is the “Aahh!” moment of Jesus’ teaching – justice comes from “self-less” giving. Justice springs from our innermost being exercising generosity not fear of punishment. We are to practice self-giving always, not just when it is convenient or when we have surplus time or money or resources, but when the other person needs it. Jesus is saying that when it comes to other human beings, we owe to everyone perfect justice. By “everyone” he really means everyone, including loved ones and enemies alike and by perfect justice he means generous self-giving love, not tit-for-tat, not contractual love – I give you this and you give me that.

So we are encouraged today to put the difficult and counter-cultural lesson of selfless giving into practice in our lives. We are told our salvation lies in conforming our wills to the Lord's and “be holy as the Father is holy”. We are asked to practice self-less love in our private and our public lives. We are individually called to holiness not hide behind some corrupted sense of justice or dare I say entitlement? Everyone is to love everyone the way God loves us all. Holiness means to possess divine grace and to live righteous and holy lives. We have been given everything we need to find our way back to the Father. We no longer need to defend ourselves against every slight, real or imagined, no longer do we have to hold on to resentments, no longer do we have to keep score, no longer do we hang onto the outmoded concept that justice is for my personal gain. Rather we are free to really make a gift of ourselves to others. This is what our Heavenly Father does for us. Jesus in his mission encourages us in the truth that we can reach to perfect holiness only through the intervention of God's justice, which is the gift of the mercy of redemption. We will love with God's own love, which does not diminish itself in response to the threat of evil. God does not love less because he does not see his love exist in us or that it may not be returned. God looks beyond that closed view of love so he sent his Son to be our guide and model who encourages us to “Be holy, for I, the LORD, your God, am holy.” And yes this includes for us to follow God's notion of “Love of enemy is how God loves”. Just look at Jesus' love for his enemies as he hung dying on the cross – he forgave them so they would not be in debt to Him before the Father! As Catholic Christians, we have the means to accomplish this in the graces of the Sacraments and the companionship of the Church around us to give us the strength and courage to practice holiness - always.

With Lent 2017 just over a week and a half away, I encourage all to understand that we need to abandon the wisdom the world gives us that justice is for our gain. We need to abandon all fears and temptations that distract us from always giving selflessly to all who need our loving response. We need to love them specifically in the way Jesus asks us to – as the Father loves us - now. Take this as a preview ad to have a holy Lent by playing the game for love not worldly goods -and- practice how to “be perfect as the Father is perfect”. Amen.