

The Perfection of Forgiveness Eleventh Week in Ordinary Time Tuesday,
June 17, 2014 8:15 AM **1 Kgs 21:17-29; Ps 51:3-4, 5-6ab, 11, 16; Mt 5:43-48** (A radical change in the very way we think and feel about everything, especially about our enemies, our opponents, our adversaries, our persecutors.)

The theme of forgiveness runs through the entire Scripture. In the Psalm there is this prayer that we just heard: “In the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense. Thoroughly wash me from my guilt.” So this idea was present that **God could wash away human guilt.** And yet as we see from the first reading from the Book of Kings, it was rarely done in a complete way. **God has created a creation that is all good. Where does evil come from? It comes from human beings who choose it in preference to God, in preference to God’s will.**

Now in the **Old Testament** the idea is that **once evil is released** it has to run its course; **it has certain consequences.** So this king undergoes a conversion of sorts; he repents. So God says, well, you see, Ahab has repented, so I will not carry out the consequences of this evil in terms of punishment in his time but, rather, in the time of his son. It’s that God, in a way, can’t cancel the consequences, only postpone them. Why? Because of the collective nature of Israel, the collective nature of the human race, actually. **Individuals may seek healing, forgiveness, cleansing, but the collective cannot.** Somehow there must be some consequence once sin is introduced, which is the reason why the Israelites stoned sinners, because there had to be consequences. **They had to eliminate this malignancy from their society.**

Now **that’s precisely the kind of mentality that Jesus is fighting.** He does not believe that that will ever bring about the kingdom of God. **You cannot eliminate evil; you have to forgive evil.** You have to live with it as well. That’s why he told the parable of the weeds and the wheat. They have to grow together; at least now for a while they have to grow together. We, **if we want to really strive for true holiness,** it’s not following the Law, but **it’s becoming “perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect.”** That’s very different. That’s not just being a law-abiding citizen. That’s not just following the Torah, every jot and tittle. It’s an entirely different project. It’s becoming “perfect just as your heavenly Father is

perfect.” **That is a radical change in the very way we think and feel about everything, especially about our enemies, our opponents, our adversaries, our persecutors.**

There is a natural defensive mechanism in human life, as in all life. When attacked, **animals either fight back or flee. But human beings have other options.** The option here Jesus is talking about is being “perfect just as in your heavenly Father is perfect.” **What would the Father do?** Well, Jesus himself exemplifies what the Father would do. He is the Son. He shares the heart of the Father. And it’s as Jesus does that we know—**it’s through Jesus that we know what the Father is like.** And we know the Father through Jesus much more clearly than we would know the Father or the Son or the Holy Spirit through the prophet Elijah or stories about Elijah. Those are stories that only reflect an aspect of life.

But Jesus is not an aspect of life. He is the incarnation of the source of life, and he reveals in his own life, in his own way, in his own words, **in his own actions, how the Father responds to persecution, intimidation, conflict, hostility, evil affront.** And how is that? That’s what **Jesus exemplifies in his passion and death: this compassionate, loving acceptance, this overpowering love that is stronger than anything else.**

That’s what he tells his disciples what they have to start working on: **going beyond the Law.** “You have heard it said, but I say.” Go beyond it; go beyond everything you think you can do, because there is something else in you that is not just you. **The Holy Spirit of God is alive and working if only you allow it to, but you are free.** As we grow older we do **become a certain kind of person through our actions and choices, our habits.** We become a certain kind of person. Sometimes that kind of person isn’t very much like the Father, so **we have a lot of reforming, changing, altering. It begins with our perceptions of who we should be,** who we are called to be. “So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.”