

Love Your Enemies Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time/C February 24, 2019
1 Sm 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23; 1 Cor 15:45-49; **Lk 6:27-38** (We have to connect our concerns not only toward our friends, our families, or even our compatriots, we have to extend it way beyond that to include enemies, aliens, strangers.)

“Love your enemies, and do good to those who curse you.”

The first thing we need to note about this gospel reading is how odd it is, how odd to require or expect **human beings to love their enemies. This is unnatural.** We naturally return what we get, as do all animals. But this teaching is, in fact, unique to Jesus in all world religions. There’s not one other that says that we should love our enemies, not Judaism, not Islam, not Hinduism, not Buddhism. Buddhism says we should not react to our enemies, but doesn’t say we should love them. **So this is unique, and it defines in a certain sense the teachings of Christ.**

Now we need to ask ourselves, Well where did he get this? The answer is obvious. **He got this idea from his personal knowledge of the Father.** What Jesus taught he taught from a wellspring within himself that was constituted by his relationship to the Father. And he recognized that the Father was good and benevolent to everyone, good and evil. He recognized that “the sun shone on the just and the unjust, that the rain fell on the good and the bad,” that **God is good out of God’s own nature, not in reaction to anyone or anything.** This you could even call the sovereignty of God’s will, that God acts according to his own will, not according to what others do toward him.

Now **Jesus is recommending, in fact teaching, that we need to emulate this quality of God.** But as I said, it is unnatural for human beings because we belong to the animal kingdom. We can see in the animal kingdom there are natural enemies and they fight each other and they eat each other. And that’s also what human beings do naturally, but Jesus says we need to rise above this kind of behavior. Indeed our capacity to receive may be limited, but **the gift that God**

is presenting, the mercy that God is giving, is in itself infinite. And not only that, but even our limitations are actually self-imposed. They are not imposed by God because we are created in the image and likeness of God, therefore potentially also infinite in love and knowledge and every other quality of God. So we have to see that our limitations are not fate or destiny. **Our limitations are folly that we impose on ourselves by our choices, because we trust ourselves more than God.** We push God away preferring our own independence and our own wisdom to the wisdom of God and what St. Paul calls “the glorious freedom of the children of God.” There’s a big difference between independence and the glorious freedom of the children of God, and too often we prefer the independence.

This bizarre and irrational phenomenon is at the center of so much human suffering, and it is **what sin is.** This is what we are talking about when we say sin. **We are talking about this irrational preference for our own independence and wisdom over the freedom and the wisdom that God wants to share with us.**

Now because sin has so colored human thought and imagination, not only individually but collectively, culturally, **Jesus began his mission with the announcement “Repent and believe.”** Repent means **change your ways of thinking and feeling,** or another way of putting this is **convert or be converted.**

Conversion includes an emotional change that many of us are not ready for. That’s the actual focus of the gospel today. **Because we are not ready for this emotional change, we feel the gospel, at least today’s version, is unrealistic and unreasonable and too ideal.** Loving our enemies is not natural. But Jesus does not want us to be natural, nor merely rational in the usual sense, nor realistic in the ordinary sense. He wants us to be something much different. **He wants us to become godly.** The whole reason for God becoming human was so that humanity could

become godly, filled with the divine nature, the divine love, the divine knowledge. **This means we have to connect our concerns not only toward our friends, our families, or even our compatriots, we have to extend it way beyond that to include enemies, aliens, strangers.**

And we have to do this one step at a time. It takes practice. **We have to somehow begin at some point to concretely do it.**

Now we all know that **one of the most urgent needs in the world today is for food.** An astonishing number of people don't have enough to eat. A shockingly great number of people go to bed hungry, if you call it "going to bed." The way they spend their night is not in bed, but lying somewhere, hungry. **Our country has been blessed with abundance, and it is only right that we share that abundance with others.** However, today in our Congress there are senators and representatives trying to cut back on the amount of food the United States sends to hungry nations in the world, and it would be a terrible shame if they were to be successful. One concrete way you might take to love the stranger or the enemy or the alien is to send a postcard, they are available in the library, to **ask Congress not to cut support for this very crucial need of our sisters and brothers worldwide.**