

**Love of Enemies**    Third Week of Lent    Friday, March 29, 2019    Hos 14:2-10;    **Mk 12:28-34**    Healing Mass    (What Jesus wants to do is bring us into communion, not only with him, but with us.)

**“And when Jesus saw that he answered with understanding, he said to him, ‘You are not far from the Kingdom of God.’”**

I don’t know if you would enjoy hearing that said to you, “You are not far from the kingdom of God,” or whether you’d rather hear, “Oh, that’s it, you have embraced the Kingdom of God.” **So what is lacking in this scribe’s confession? He spoke with understanding, and yet he was not really on the mark, quite.** He was not far, but it wasn’t on the mark.

Well, what did he say? **He said, “You are right in saying, ‘He is One and there is no other than he. And to love him with all your heart, with all your understanding, with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself,’ is worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”** That is a true statement, but doesn’t go far enough, because of course this is a statement about the sacrifices in the temple. And we know that **Jesus** was about replacing, if you want to put it that way, the temple and the sacrifice of the temple. When he went in there he drove out the moneychangers and all the sheep and the oxen and the birds and the pigeons because he **was the new sacrifice that would please the Father. “Sacrifices and oblations you did not desire; but a body you have prepared for me.”** So, yes, this scribe saw the relative lack of importance in the various offerings and sacrifices in the temple.

**But what he didn’t quite understand was that these two commandments really were the entire Law and contained the whole of God’s will.** They simply weren’t the two most important; they were utterly inclusive, because God is a God of love. In fact, God is love, and we come from love, and we are invited to return to love. Our life on earth is a sojourn from love to love, and what we have to learn is all about love, nothing else. **And on the way to learning about love, we learn what real sacrifice is. It is letting go of oneself.** It is being willing to become what God wants us to become, which is really identical with God, although that may sound odd. But as St. Thomas points out, **the Word became flesh so that we could become divine.** The divine Word became flesh and dwelt among us so that we can be raised up. We know that the point of Jesus’ ministry was to bring about a new birth. **He was the beginning of a new creation: a new heaven and a new earth.** And when do we enter into that new heaven and new earth? We know that **we have reached the rebirth that is signified in Baptism when we really can forgive.**

Now many of us are struggling with forgiveness, and that’s okay. That’s where we are. God loves us all along the way. But we have really been reborn, we have really been united into the divine when really and truly we can love our enemy, because **that is of God: to love our enemy, to forgive those who harm us.** Think of Jesus on the cross and what he said, “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.” This is the divine Word speaking.

I have known many very virtuous people, some with no real faith, but with tremendous dedication to goodness and integrity and generosity and truthfulness and even charity in the true sense, but sometimes they are just not able to experience forgiveness, which is actually part of charity. It’s the fuller part of it. Sometimes people just cannot, and you may be one of them who

**cannot right at the moment forgive or love your enemy.** It is possible, **especially if the enemy is living in your house**, and very often that is where the enemy lives. So this is a great challenge, but we have to believe that God is preparing us by every act of faith and faithfulness, every act of trust, every expression of hope, and of doing good to others, **we are all being prepared for the gift of ultimate love of enemy, and forgiveness, even for those who have really harmed us.**

Now toward this end of course we need tremendous patience. **If we become impatient, we are putting too much emphasis on ourselves.** Everything is already worked out in the mind of God, but the mind of God works beyond space and time as we know it. But we are still caught in space and time. So the fullness of God's plan is not within our reach, in that sense, in space and time. **So we have to give room to ourselves for our own growth, and we do have to recognize that God's plan is really without limit.** The point at which he is inviting is, is a point of infinity, **infinite love.** What we have to avoid is **simply trying to obstruct our own growth by holding on to resentments, by holding on to unforgiveness, to grudges, not letting people feel that we have accepted them, demanding that others live according to our standards.** These are all ways in which we obstruct our own growth toward the infinite heart of the Father.

So this young man, this scribe, was not far from the kingdom of heaven. He was in a good place, but he wasn't quite in the place of seeing what God is really doing. We can learn that only through **Jesus himself. He has to be our teacher.** He has to be our companion, because as in the fourth gospel, as John records of him, he says, "I am the way and the truth and the life." And as we come to the **Eucharist, it is Christ himself feeding us with his own body and blood,** the blood that was **poured out on the cross in love of you, and in love of your enemy,** in love of you and of those members of your family from which you are estranged. And **what he wants to do is bring us into communion, not only with him, but with us.**