

## Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

When I look around my office in the Parish House, I am reminded that I have a lot of cleaning up, sorting out and throwing away to do before I hand things over to Fr. Philip. Sometimes it looks all too much. Sometimes I think it will be too hard to do. But bit by bit I am getting the job done.

Today's gospel can be a bit like that. At first sight it seems to be just too hard for us to attempt to hear and try to live what Jesus calls us to do. We are continuing to listen to the way in which Jesus interprets the will of God for us. We look at the last two case studies that he presents to us to help us to understand how a disciple of Jesus obeys the Law of God.

The first case study is about retaliation, the second about love of enemies. The people of Israel were taught that they could only take an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. The law's purpose was to limit the harm that one person or family could do to another when they were trying to redress an injustice. The law was an attempt to prevent a cycle of violence that may have erupted when wrong was done.

Jesus wants his disciples to go far beyond that. His disciples were called to disarm violence by offering twice as much as was demanded of them. As we know

from the account of the Passion and how Simon of Cyrene was forced to carry the cross of Jesus, the Roman authorities could demand much of the people whose country they occupied. Jesus was aware of how difficult that was already for people, but he asked even more. "If someone forces you to go one mile with them, go two miles. If someone demands your shirt give them your cloak as well". This response can only be made by someone who is sure of the mercy and love of God at work in and through them. What seems to be impossible for us is made possible by the one whose love is deep within our hearts.

The same can be said about love of enemies. The Law of Moses called the people of Israel to love their neighbour as they loved themselves. We saw that in our reading today from the Book of Leviticus. Nowhere do we find the written Law telling people to hate their enemies. But that was the popular understanding that many had. Our understanding of that word "Hate" is not quite the same as the understanding that people in Jesus' time had. It was a matter of choosing who to love. Loving our neighbours was hard enough. Loving those who were good to us was demanding enough. There was no energy left to love those who made themselves our enemies.

But this is where Jesus wants to take us to another level. He wants us to look at how God acts. God doesn't sit

down and decide who deserves the rain. He sends the rain to good and bad alike. God doesn't hold back his gifts from anybody. God loves all people with the same unbounded love.

Jesus calls us to take on the mind and heart of God. Jesus calls us to let God so expand our hearts that we will have love enough there, not just for those who treat us well, but for those who treat us badly. As in all that Jesus calls us to do as his disciples, Jesus simply asks us to look at him. He sets the pattern for our behaviour. When we follow Jesus to the cross, we see and hear him loving and forgiving those who hate him.

When we think that all of this is beyond us then we need to look again at what St Paul told us today. He reminded us that we are the temples of God and that God's Spirit lives within us. God has chosen us to see beyond human wisdom to the wisdom that comes from Him. Paul tells us that we belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God. When we understand something of that then we can accept that what Jesus calls us to do in our love for others is not beyond us, because it is not beyond Jesus.

In our reading from Leviticus we heard God say, "Be holy, for I the Lord your God, am holy. Jesus follows up on this by saying "Be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect." That can sound to be something quite

impossible for us. It is a hill too steep to climb, a challenge too difficult to attempt. If to be perfect or to be holy means that we never sin then holiness and perfection is beyond us. But if to be perfect means that we allow God to act through us in the way that God acts, then it is possible. If to be perfect means to allow God to reach out through us to all people, even our enemies, then perfection is not beyond us.

God has taken the initiative to bring us into his family and to make us his children. We are perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect when we live as his children. We live as children of God when we let Jesus, the Son of God, live and love through us. He is there within us giving us strength to climb the hill, manage the task and face the challenges that we meet each day ever learning to be his disciples.