

HOMILY for 7th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year A

This Sunday's readings talk about loving our enemy as one of the important Commandments in our Christian faith. Pondering on that message, I'm reminded of this cute story I'd like to share with you.

An explorer went into an undiscovered tomb for the first time, & in the center of the tomb there was a lamp. So, he picked it up & as he started to rub the dirt off it, a genie came out of the lamp & said, "I want to know the person you hate the most."

The explorer said, "That's gotta be my ex-wife. Why?"

"I am a cursed genie. I will grant you three wishes; but whatever you wish for, your ex-wife will get double the amount."

"Okay, I wish for a billion dollars."

"Granted, but your ex-wife gets two billion dollars."

"I wish for a mansion in Hawaii with a swimming pool, & tennis courts, everything."

"Granted, & your ex-wife gets two of that. Now make your final wish."

The explorer walked around for a few minutes, returned to the genie with a stick & said, "You see this stick, I'd like you to beat me half to death."

That's not nice; but that's how some people feel about their enemy. Anyway, if last Sunday's readings discuss about God's Commandments in general, on this Sunday we hear in details about one particular Commandment, namely, how to love our neighbor. In fact, this Sunday's First Reading has this message to share with us, "...You shall not bear hatred for your brother/sister in your heart. Though you may have to reprove your fellowman, do not incur sin because of him. Take no revenge & cherish no grudge against your fellow countrymen. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord." That's a nice teaching & great advice. But, who will be able to live up to that wonderful teaching? How can we love our neighbor when they try to hurt us? Just ask the Ukrainians who have been bombarded by their neighbor the Russians & see if they could love those neighbors. How can we expect the Ukrainians to take no revenge & cherish no grudge against the Russians after all the horrible things they've had to endure in that war? How can we not bear hatred for our brother/sister in our hearts when they lie to us & do things against our will? Just talk to people who have been lied to, cheated, or treated badly & see if they could forgive & forget those who have done that to them. I'm sure they could not easily forgive & forget those who have done them harm.

In case we want to hear on how Jesus feels about this whole business of loving our neighbor, today's Gospel lets us know about it as the following, "Jesus said to His disciples: 'You have heard the Commandment, 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.'" But, what I say to you is: Offer no resistance to injury. When someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn & offers him the other. If anyone want to go to law over your shirt, hand him your coat as well. Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go with him two miles..." Jesus seemingly asked us to take hits from the world like a tough fighter & be nice to everyone for His sake. But, He did not want us to stop there. He continued, "...You have heard the Commandment, 'You shall love your countryman & hate your enemy.' My command to you is: Love your enemies, pray for your persecutors. This will prove that you are sons/daughters of your Heavenly Father, for He lets His sun rise on the bad & the good, & allows the rain to come down on the just & the unjust. If you love those who love you, what merit is there in that? Do not tax collectors [& sinners] do as

much? And if you greet your brothers/sisters only, what is so praiseworthy about that? Do not pagans do as much? In a word, you must be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect." So, Jesus would like us to love not only our neighbor but also our enemy. For He wants us to be perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect. He hopes that we would be different & better than the rest of the world. Unfortunately, that is something the Church has not talked a lot about nowadays. It has focused instead on other issues & forgotten one of the most important laws in our Christian faith, namely, loving our enemies like our Heavenly Father does. That's what makes us Christians different from the rest of the world.

I took some college classes on Comparative Religions & learn a lot about many other religions in the world & their traditions. Each religion has its own unique beliefs & teachings. But, I assure you that the teaching of loving one's enemy is unique to our Christianity. In fact, most religion teach their members to live by the Golden Rule of "quid pro quo," or "Do unto others what you want them do unto you." If they follow the teachings of their faith, they would be rewarded with something wonderful in this life or the next. If they don't, they would be punished severely. That is why Jesus explained that common belief of many religions in today's Gospel as following, "You have heard the Commandment, 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.' But, what I say to you is: offer no resistance to injury. When someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn & offer him/her the other." Like I said above, this new teaching sets Christianity apart from other religions. It pushes our work on the Christian character & moral standard to the perfect level like the Heavenly Father's. So, how can we achieve that Christian perfection?

I think one of the ways for us Christians to achieve that goal of loving our enemy is first learning how to love & forgive ourselves. We often overlook the beginning of our love for the enemy & blame its failure on all sorts of reasons. We demonize our enemy & say that they don't deserve our love. Or, we shift the blame of that fallout entirely on our enemy & refuse to reconcile & find peace for that situation. But, I believe that we can never forgive our enemy unless we learn to love & forgive ourselves first. Reconciliation with someone cannot happen unless we wrestle with the demons within us first & then try to settle all the hurts & hatred that we might have with that person. That is why we have heard some people say, "I can forgive someone, but I cannot forget what he/she did;" namely, they have not known how to forgive themselves yet. What I'm trying to say is that the lesson on forgiving someone or loving our enemy begins with us. The more we learn to forgive & love ourselves, the easier it will be for us when we have to forgive & love our enemy. All we need to do is try to practice forgiving & cut ourselves a break over many mistakes that we might do every day. The more we practice it, the better we'll get at forgiving others, including our enemy.

My dear brothers & sisters, it's difficult to love ourselves on certain days. Today, we're called to love our neighbor. But, we cannot stop there. Jesus expects us to love our enemy as the Heavenly Father has allowed the sun to rise on the bad & the good & the rain to pour down on the just & the unjust. That task might be difficult for us at first, but the more we practice it & learn to love & forgive ourselves the easier it will be for us to love our enemy over the years. Remember that Jesus wants us Christians to be perfect & different from the rest of the world.