

HOMILY for 7th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year C

A woman driving down the freeway in an SUV got so mad at the man in front of her who was driving the speed limit that she pulled up alongside him, honked her horn, screamed obscenities at him, gave him the finger, and waved a piston. And then the blue lights behind her flashed; and the police pulled her over and arrested her and took her to the station, fingerprinted her, and put her in a cell. After a couple of hours, the policeman came and apologized.

He said, "I'm sorry, Madam. You see, when I saw you do that, I noticed the Bush-Cheney bumper sticker and the 'What Jesus Do' bumper sticker and the chrome-plated fish emblem, and I assumed you had stolen the car!"

Anyway, altercations like the one in that cute story happen around us all the time. They pitch one person against another & create all sorts of feuds. Those feuds drag out for months & deepen our differences. Adding to that, our society is full of controversial issues that stir up various emotions & create all kinds of fights. Those public & personal fights create enemies & make us angry at one another. Instead of making of compromises & helping one another look for solutions for their differences, we see our current world emphasizes the importance of getting things its way & praises disruptors & rebellious acts. We do not see people desire & work for common good these days. Rather, all we hear about is "me" & "my freedom." That attitude has caused people to mistreat one another & create more anger & bickering in our society. We see more hatred & fights around the world nowadays instead of love & friendship.

That is why it does not come as the surprise for us to see Jesus & the Bible attempt to address the issue of hatred & enemy. They want us to replace a world of hatred & fights with one of love & friendship. The only way for us to see that happen is to begin that change with each of us. So, if our enemies happen to be delivered into our lucky hands, what would we do? Do we continue to insist on getting our way & crushing our enemies at all cost? Or, are we humble & merciful enough to search for compromises & peace with our enemies? To help us answer those questions & get some practice in dealing with hatred & our enemies, today's First Reading shares with us the story of how Saul hunted down David & tried to kill him. Their animosity began after David defended Goliath & the Philistines to protect the people of God. Everyone praised David for that victory & ignored Saul who happened to be the King of Israel. Saul became jealous & felt threatened by David. He decided to eliminate that threat & tried to hunt down & kill David. In his search, Saul had to spend a night in a cave with his group. David & his men were able to sneak up on Saul & kill him that night. But, David decided to spare the life of his enemy. Here is how this Sunday's First Reading tells us about David's deliberation on that tough decision.

Abishai whispered to David: "God has delivered your enemy into your grasp this day. Let me nail him to the ground with one thrust of the spear; I will not need a second thrust!" But, David said to Abishai, "Do not harm him, for who can lay hands on the Lord's anointed & remain unpunished?" So, David took the spear & the water jug from their place at Saul's head, & they got away without anyone's seeing or knowing or awakening... Going across to an opposite slope, David stood on a remote hilltop at a great distance from Abner & the troops & said: "Here is the King's spear. Let an attendant come over to get it... Today, though the Lord delivered you into my grasp, I would not harm the Lord's anointed." Wow! Was David crazy &

stupid to do that? Or, was he on to something in bringing healing to our world & helping it break out of its vicious circle of retribution? It's very rare for us to see a magnanimous figure like David. The other person who could forgive His enemies without thinking twice about it was our Lord Jesus. David could have taken out his anger & retribution on Saul when he was given the opportunity. But, he chose the high road of peace & reconciliation & stopped escalating the level of retribution by not killing Saul. Don't you think that's a refreshing idea for our world to consider? Shouldn't our world leaders & its citizens practice that idea in their daily lives? Because David chose peace & reconciliation instead of anger & retribution, the Lord blessed him with a peaceful reign & a prosperous Kingdom for a few decades.

In case we cannot see the blessings of David's refreshing idea, our Lord Jesus gives us these words of wisdom & advice on how to deal with our enemies & retribution in today's Gospel. He says, "To you who hear me, love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; bless those who curse you & pray for those who maltreat you. When someone slaps you on one cheek, turn & give him the other. When someone takes your coat, let him have your shirt as well... When a man takes what is yours, do not demand it back." So, apparently Jesus wants us to love enemies & do good to those who hate us. He asks all Christians to turn the other cheeks & pray for those who maltreat them. Ironically, I've not seen Christians do those things for their enemies or people they hate. I have not witnessed our Church & world leaders turn the other cheek & give their shirts to those who take their coats. Instead, I've observed Christians & their leaders take every opportunity to attack people whom they hate or disagree with, especially over social & spiritual issues. That's why we have seen constant fighting & bickering within the Church & around the world. I wonder how Jesus would feel about those Christians & other children of God who have done those things.

If we have not heard clearly Jesus' teaching about hatred & enemy yet, here is His last appeal to us. He says, "...If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, how can you claim any credit? Sinners do as much. If you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what merit is there in it for you? Even sinners lend to sinners." He adds, "...Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate. Do not judge, & you will not be judged. Do not condemn, & you will not be condemned... For the measure you measure with will be measured back to you." My friends, I want us to take this moment to soak in that last appeal of Jesus to all Christians & ask ourselves if we've lived up to His teaching. If we haven't yet, we must start doing it today.

My dear brothers & sisters, Jesus knew that we'll have enemies & fights all around us. Some people will mistreat us & hate us over all sorts of issues. But, we shouldn't turn our world into Hell on earth by engaging in fights & bickering every day. Instead, we should try to turn it into a display piece of Heaven. We should work hard to act as Christians & be better than the rest of the world. For that is how our Lord Jesus expects from all of us as His disciples. Moreover, remember this, "...The measure we measure with will be measured back to us on the Last Day!"