

HOMILY for 7th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year C

This Sunday's Gospel tells us to love our enemies. Thinking about that, I'm reminded of this cute story I'd like to share with you.

"Forgive our enemies" was the topic of the reverend's sermon on this particular Sunday morning. At the close of his rather long message, the preacher asked how many were willing to forgive their enemies. About half of his congregation raised their hands. Not satisfied, he preached for another twenty minutes & repeated the question. This time a few more lifted their hands.

Still unsatisfied, he lectured another fifteen minutes & repeated the question. Now, all raised their hands except one elderly lady on the back row. "Ms. Jones, aren't you willing to forgive your enemies?" the pastor inquired.

"I don't have any" was her answer.

"Ms. Jones, that's very unusual. How old are you?"

"Ninety-three."

"Ms. Jones, please come down front & tell this congregation how a person can live ninety-three years & not have an enemy in the world."

The sweet little lady tottered down the aisle, very slowly turned around, & announced, "It's easy. I just outlived them all!"

Anyway, our secular world would love to put down our Christian faith every chance possible. Our materialistic society likes to call us Christians derogatory names such as "hypocrites" or "religious nuts" & make fun of our Christian values. Most people do not appreciate the huge contribution that Christianity has made to human society over the years such as schools, hospitals, God's kitchens, orphanages, & so on. Instead, they often point out some mistakes committed by a small group of Christians like the Inquisition & sexual abuse. Unfortunately, some Christians have bought into that negative rhetoric & allowed the Prince of Darkness to tear our Christian Community apart & pull us away from our Lord Jesus. This Sunday I'd like to highlight one of the important values that distinguishes us from other religions & the rest of the world, namely, love our enemies. In my study, I have not seen any religion, except Christianity, that would ask its members to love their enemies. Most religions would stop at this Commandment: "Do unto others what you would expect them do for you." They permit their members to seek revenge & get back on their enemies.

Meanwhile, Jesus shares His personal view on that topic as following: "...Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you; bless those who curse you & pray for those who mistreat 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. Give to all who beg from you." He continues, "...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 any much... Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate. Do not judge, & you will not be judged. Give, & it shall be given to you... For the measure you measure with will be measured back to you." What do you think about that? Are you shocked to hear about Jesus' expectation on His disciples? Or, are you proud to see Him expect much more from us?

Evidently Jesus practiced what He preached as He said these last words on the Cross, "Father, forgive them for they knew not what they had done." Jesus was wrongfully convicted

& hung on the Cross. Instead of getting bitter & trying to get back on His enemies for all the terrible things they did to Him, Jesus called on God the Father to forgive them. He could do like most human beings would often do & attempt to take revenge on all the people who hurt Him. But, He chose not to do that. Instead, He chose a new way of dealing with past hurts & learned to forgive His enemies. He called on us to do the same & break the cycle of hate & retribution. That is how we would be able to bring about a new community of peace & prosperity.

In case we'd like to search for another shining example of loving one's enemies in the Bible, this Sunday's First Reading tells us how David did it to King Saul who hunted him down to kill him. King Saul acted like most human beings would do, namely, search out & destroy David his enemy. Yet, as fate would have it, David had an opportunity to kill King Saul his enemy & put an end to that deadly threat. But, David chose a different path & decided not to hurt King Saul. This is what David said, "Here is the King's spear. Let an attendant come over to get it. The Lord will reward each man according to his justice & faithfulness. Today, although the Lord delivered you [King Saul] into my grasp, I would not harm the Lord's anointed." So, David showed us our Lord's spirit of loving one's enemies & picked a new path to end the vicious cycle of hate & retribution.

We live in a world full of hate & fascinated with retribution. The lowly citizens have settled on senseless violence & vicious cycle of hate & retribution to resolve their differences. That is why we have continued to see random shootings & horrible massacres happen all over our country & around the world. Our schools & families have not taught our young much about forgiveness or set good examples of forgiveness & pardon for them. Instead, we have encouraged them to follow the rule of the jungle, namely, "an eye for an eye & a tooth for a tooth." Worst yet, our leaders have used hate & retribution to guide their daily decisions instead of love & forgiveness. They have weaponized those to destroy their enemies or people who disagree with them. That is why we have seen so much chaos & violence in our society. We have not been blessed with a shining example of good leadership like our Lord Jesus or David. Hence, we have not experienced a community of peace & prosperity.

My dear brothers & sisters, Jesus has given us & our leaders this warning in this Sunday's Gospel, "...Be compassionate as your Heavenly Father is compassionate. Do not judge, & you will not be judged. Do not condemn, & you will not be condemned. Pardon, & you shall be pardoned. Give, & it shall be given to you... For the measure you measure with will be measured back to you." Jesus did not say those empty words of advice to make Him look good & feel good. Instead, He acted on them & practiced them throughout His ministry, even at the moment of His last breath. Moreover, Jesus wanted to remind us that the way we live & treat others in this life, God the Heavenly Father will repay us in the next. So, let's keep that in mind as we learn to love our enemies & be like our Heavenly Father.