

LOOKING AT LIFE THROUGH THE LENS OF THE GOSPEL



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**SEVENTH SUNDAY IN
ORDINARY TIME**

20th February 2022

Luke 6:27 Jesus said to his disciples: “But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹ If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. ³⁰ Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. ³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you.

Luke 6:32 “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴ If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. ³⁵ But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. ³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Luke 6:37 “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸ give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”

These verses follow on from the beatitudes and could be said to put flesh on the bones of that teaching. They make it clear that the demands of the kingdom of God which Jesus came to preach are indeed very challenging and go way beyond ordinary standards of decent behaviour. Humanly speaking it is probably true to say that they are unreasonable, if not impossible. However, the last verses of today's text make it clear that the demands of the kingdom can only be understood in the light of our relationship with God. If we have any idea of the mercy and compassion of God towards us then we will undergo a conversion that empowers us to be 'compassionate as your Father is compassionate'.

SEAN GOAN—Let the Reader Understand, Year C

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

Our Gospel takes us to some of the best-remembered teachings of Jesus, the heart of Christian behaviour and ethics.

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 27 The opening phrase is strong, even abrupt in Greek, lit. “but to you I say who are listening.” The first imperative is simple: love your enemies. This is really new. There is no command in the Jewish Scriptures to love (or indeed to hate) the enemy. However, in the later Jewish tradition we find the same high ideal (e.g., the Testament of Benjamin). Neighbour in Leviticus means one of your own people, not an outsider.

Verses 29-30 The verbs are now in the singular, suggesting concrete action by an individual. Non-retaliation is the key: not to respond in kind but rather to change the dynamic by other means. V. 30 has been labeled the most outrageous of the instructions. It is good to remember that these are not rules to be followed in a mechanistic way but illustrations of principle.

Verse 31 The Golden Rule is found in the Old Testament and widely in the culture. (The motive is not reciprocal benefit but is entirely altruistic. Christian agapē has been defined as: seeking the well-being of the other without expectation of benefit to one's self. This contrasts with the culture of mutual benefaction of the time.

Thought for the day

In the most generous perspective, the desire for retaliation represents a longing for justice and equity. For example, “an eye for an eye.” Such justice is easily distorted into vengeance, hence the limiting of vengeance to precisely equal retaliation in the Old Testament. That tempering of vengeance does not really go far enough. The problem is responding in kind—the ultimate logic of which would be one person left with one eye!! Jesus goes to the heart of the matter: do not respond to violence with violence, do not engage at the level offered. Instead, turn the dynamic on its head: love your enemies and break the cycle of hatred and violence.

KIERAN O'MAHONY OSA—www.tarsus.ie

We live in a society where it is difficult to learn to love unselfishly. In almost every case we ask: What's it good for? Is it useful? What do I get in return? We calculate and measure everything. We've become accustomed to the idea that you can get everything by paying for it: food, clothes, housing, transport, entertainment. In this way we run the risk of converting all our interactions into a pure exchange of services.

But love, friendship, acceptance, solidarity, closeness, intimacy, the fight for the weak, hope, inner joy—none of these are obtained with money. They're offered freely without expecting to get back anything, except the growth and enhancement of the life of another.

The first Christians, when speaking of love, used the word *agape* to underline strongly the dimension of grace, over against love that is only understood as *eros*, which could have for many an echo of self-interest and selfishness.

There are men and women in our midst who can only receive love gratuitously, for they hardly have anything to give back to those who wish to come to their aid: people who live alone, those battered by life, misunderstood by almost everyone, impoverished by society.

The existence of many would change and acquire another flavour and another life, if they only learned to love someone gratis — for nothing. Like it or not, human beings are made to love unconditionally; and if they do not do it, a vacuum opens up in their lives. It isn't naive to take seriously the words of Jesus: "Do good .. without expecting to get back anything." It could turn out to be the secret of a happy life; it could give back to us the joy of life.

JOSÉ A PAGOLA—Following in the Footsteps of Jesus, Year C

An eye for an eye will leave the whole world blind.

The political landscape, particularly in the West, has shifted in recent years. We live in a time of upheaval and division. Every issue is divided into dramatically opposing views, with those on the 'other side' labelled as deluded and out to destroy all that is good. The listening stops, and there is only disdain and vitriol.

Jesus tells us there is another way. His words invert our usual human 'wisdom' about enemies and forgiveness. In place of arguments and revenge, he proposes a radical new way of engaging with others. He is not encouraging us to be passive. Rather, he is inviting us to a 'third way'; to think about people not as enemies, but as sisters and brothers, and to make a non-violent stand when faced with persecution. We see the humanity in others, and we invite them to see our humanity in the way we treat them.

This gospel is extremely challenging. Let's not gloss over its difficult call to love beyond what we would imagine to be possible. Can you pray for someone who has hurt you, or whose attitudes you find challenging. Send them peace.

TRÍONA DOHERTY & JANE MELLETT—Go Deeper

We must meditate on this gospel reading as Jesus would want us to: not as a burdensome obligation (he condemned the Pharisees for imposing burdens on people), but as a celebration. "Fixing his eyes" on us (last Sunday's reading), Jesus invites us to celebrate with him what is best in ourselves.

The language is poetical and dramatic stirring up wonder in us at the wonderful thing that is generosity of spirit. Every once in a while God blesses our world with such people – St Francis of Assisi in earlier times, Gandhi and Mother Teresa in our century. We have known such people personally too – a father or mother, grandparent, aunt or uncle, a friend who mirrored for us the infinite compassion of God.

We celebrate our own greatness too, the fleeting moments when, as parents, teachers, friends, or church ministers, we found we had the capacity to rise above pettiness, desire for revenge and sectarianism, and reach out to others in love. We got a glimpse of the divine spark within us.

MICHEL DE VERTEUIL—Lectio Divina on the Sunday Gospels

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. Our natural tendency when attacked is to self-protection and when we are attacked, we attack back. We respond to an angry word with another, or to a blow by hitting back. Here Jesus suggests that at times there may be another way to act. What has been your experience of retaliation? Has it been life-giving? Have you experience of another way of acting?
2. When we do good to another, it can sometimes be in return for what we have received. At other times it can be done in the hope of getting something back. Or we may do it simply for the sake of doing good without any strings attached. Jesus suggests that this is when we are at our best. Recall your experience of these different ways of giving and celebrate the occasions when you gave without expectation of return.
3. Jesus proposes the generosity of God as a model for our generosity, and says that the generous will be rewarded. Perhaps you have experienced rewards, even in this life, from generous behaviour.

JOHN BYRNE OSA—Intercom