

SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Year C: 1Sm 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23; Ps 103; 1Cor 15:45-49; Lk 6:27-38

February 20, 2022

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“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.” This is probably one of the most difficult teachings of Christ to put into practice. Almost every fiber of our fallen nature resists the thought of doing good to those who hurt us. When others hurt us, we feel the right to be angry and to retaliate in some way. But the teaching of Christ to love our enemies challenges us not to retaliate when we are offended. Since most of us don't have any declared enemies in the world, the command to love our enemies applies for most of us to the people in our lives and even in our families who are most difficult to accept and live with.

In the first reading, we heard how David refrained from killing Saul when he had the chance, even though Saul was seeking to kill David out of jealousy. David's soldier Abishai was excited about the opportunity to get revenge on Saul. When they found Saul sleeping, he said to David, *“God has delivered your enemy into your grasp Let me nail him to the ground with one thrust of the spear; I will not need a second thrust!”* How often we want to nail our opponents to the ground. We want to retaliate and punish them for hurting us, even if they are people close to us. We feel the right to retaliate in some way for the hurt they have caused us.

But Jesus teaches us that this is a very fallen and earthly way of thinking. And He challenges us to rise above this tendency to punish those who hurt us, and even to love them. This is what David did when he refrained from killing Saul. And David's mercy caused Saul to admit his fault and to apologize. He said, *“I have done wrong. Come back, David, my son! I will not harm you again, because you considered my life precious today even though I have been a fool and have made a serious mistake”* (1Sam 26:21). Sometimes a gesture of mercy and restraint on our part triggers some deep soul searching in those who hurt us. It might be that our mercy and refusal to retaliate is what God will use to inspire their conversion. Gestures of mercy are hard to ignore.

But still, forgiving and loving those who hurt us is no easy task. Blessing those who curse us and praying for those who mistreat us is utterly contrary to our fallen human nature. When we kneel down to pray, we don't usually think to pray for those who have hurt us. We usually think of those we love, and we want to

pray for them. Loving our enemies and praying for those who mistreat us can take a superhuman, or supernatural, effort. And thankfully that's exactly what is possible when we make a deep conversion to Christ. When we convert our hearts to Christ, it's like we are clothed with a new supernatural ability.

This is what St. Paul was describing in the second reading. He describes Christ as the second Adam, the heavenly one, who teaches us how to overcome the effects of the Fall of the first Adam, the earthly one. The first Adam, the natural man, came first, and caused all the consequences of the Fall that infect us and make our lives a struggle. But then Christ, the second Adam, came to teach us a new, redeemed way of life, and this life requires renouncing and resisting our fallen impulses and inclinations, such as the urge and desire to retaliate when we are offended. "The Incarnation, for St. Paul, did not mean primarily that God had become *a* man; it meant primarily that God had become *man*, [and] had infected the human race, as it were, with his divinity" (Ronald Knox, *Pastoral Sermons and Occasional Sermons*, 562). St. Paul says, "*The first man was from the earth, earthly; the second man, from heaven. ... Just as we have borne the image of the earthly one, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly one.*" In one of his other letters, St. Paul says conversion to Christ is like changing the clothes of your self. He says, "*[Y]ou should put away the old self of your former way of life, corrupted through deceitful desires, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new self, created in God's way in righteousness and holiness of truth*" (Eph 4:22-24).

Christ is the new man, the new Adam, and the new self that we can put on when we convert our hearts to Him. And when we "put on Christ," we gain a new ability to live the redeemed life He taught and to resist the tendencies of the Fall, including the urge to retaliate. Perhaps the most common retaliation in a family is the dreaded "silent treatment," when we refuse to speak to those who offend us. We sometimes feel that we are entitled to ignore and be rude to those who hurt us. But Christ teaches us a different, better way – a way that can bring peace to a family and a home. He teaches us to love our enemies, to do good to those who hate us, to bless those who curse us, and to pray for those who mistreat us. This is never easy, but if one member of a family learns to do it, by converting the heart to Christ, it can be contagious, and it can trigger and inspire the same in others.

Gestures of mercy and forgiveness are hard to ignore. And it could be that our own efforts to put on Christ and refuse to retaliate will be what God uses to inspire and bring others to the same conversion to Christ.