

Homily  
February 19, 2023  
Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time  
27:00 – 38:52

**So be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.**

Now that's a challenge, isn't it? Anybody here perfect? Raise your hand.

How can the Lord ask us that? We're not perfect. We're human. In the First Reading, the Lord said, "Be holy, for I the Lord, your God am holy." Is anyone here going to claim that they are holy? So, how can the Lord ask that of his people?

Let's put it in context. *Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect*, is in the context of living out a radical love. And *being holy as God is holy*, is living out the Covenant, which is an expression of holiness. The contexts for both are love. Love of neighbor. Love of the alien. And love of your enemy.

Leviticus Chapter 19 – If you've ever read the book of Leviticus you know it can go on chapter after chapter with Levitical priestly practice, that is "liturgy." How to do the sacrifices, etc., in the Temple and outside of the Temple. But there are moments in Leviticus where it's aimed at the people, such as this particular passage.

It is here that people are called not only to be holy, but they are to love their neighbor as themselves. Well, that's hard enough, but in this case in Leviticus, in this particular passage it means your fellow countrymen. And one would think loving your fellow countrymen isn't that hard. Don't we try to do that?

But if you go to verses 33 and 34 in that same chapter, it says, "The alien that lives among you, love them as yourself." Love them as you would your countrymen. This was a radical change. Anyone who pitched their tent, who lived amidst the people of God, were to be treated the same way as one's kin.

So, we are to love the neighbor whom we know and the alien who lives among us. We can see why the Gospel is tied to this First Reading, can't we?

It's very, very clear. We have prescriptions of the law and they are telling us how to live.

And then Jesus comes up with, “You have heard it said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’” (Which by the way, my brothers and sisters, this also comes from Leviticus and was there to help people keep a balance in retribution. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.) But he says, “That’s what they say, but I say, ‘Love your enemies.’” Love your enemies. That is a whole step beyond the other passages in Leviticus.

There is nowhere in the Old Testament where it is said, “Hate your enemies.” God never says that. Possibly Jesus was reacting to something that was going on in his own time. Remember the Roman occupation? They were hated. They were the enemy and they were constantly present. Perhaps that was what he had heard they say it is said. And he says, “No. That’s not right. Love your enemy.”

Jesus uses three wonderful examples of those who are evil, those who would be considered “enemy.” Based on the Law of Moses: which says, “Strike someone on one cheek, but not both.” To do so was to shame them. Jesus says, “If an enemy strikes you on one cheek, let them slap the other.” It’s a radical form of love! But if they know the Law of Moses, that’s a radical break. And one slapping twice should be ashamed of yourself for doing so.

The second example: If someone takes you to the law courts over your tunic, give them your cloak as well. For there is a passage in the Law which says very clearly that if someone puts their tunic as a guarantee for a loan and gives it to you in the morning, you must give it back in the evening, so that they may have something in which to sleep and stay warm. But in this case, Jesus takes it even further. “Give your cloak as well.” If they’re going to go to Law over that, and leave you cold, well give them your cloak. Show the radical love and in doing so, you will bring shame upon them. Perhaps they will change.

Then there was the Roman Law. We’ve seen the Law of Moses. And now we see, “if someone asks you to go one mile, go two.”

Did you know that the Romans invented “mile markers”? Yeah. They did. And you know we’ve got one right out here. “82,” a little blue thing. That’s the eighty-second mile heading toward Ohio of U.S. 40. Which doesn’t go through town anymore, but we know where it was. Yeah. All those mile markers on the Interstate and other roads, the Romans invented it.

Why? Well, in part because troops in that time – Roman soldiers – could requisition an individual to carry a burden for them for one mile. No more. And Jesus uses this and says, “Go

two miles.” Show that you can go further, that you can show a radical love. And again, that love will shame them. But that’s not the purpose ultimately, the shame. The purpose is the radical love.

There is a liberality of love, according to Jesus. And it is very challenging. But it is rooted, my brothers and sisters in *Imago Dei*. That means the image of God. We heard it at the very beginning of the Liturgy. God created us in his own image and likeness. And we are to treat others in that fashion. That is the root of the Law of Love. And it’s the root of all Catholic Social Teaching. It is radical. It is challenging. It asks us to be holy. Or as Matthew’s Gospel says, “Be perfect.”

Brothers and sisters, do you find radical love easy? If you didn’t find being holy easy and you didn’t find being perfect easy... Moment after moment, day after day, there’s that challenge. But the Lord asks us to live as Christians, to live as Judeo-Christians, to live this radical Law of Love. Knowing that it will only come to perfection when we die. You see, the words it says here, “**Be perfect...**” I see it more as **become perfect**. It is a process. It just depends how you translate the Greek. Which, I don’t know Greek that well anyway, but that’s what they say.

Become perfect. Each day, each moment, with neighbor, yes. And countrymen. And we know that’s challenging at times right now. But the alien that lives among you, or in our case, would like to live among us. Or our enemies. This is much more difficult right now, with what’s going on in Ukraine and other parts of the world. How can we ask them, “love” those who have caused so much pain? But the Lord does ask us.

So go out there and become perfect.

At least try. For that is the Law and the Prophets and the gift that Jesus Christ has given to us.