

SEVENTH SUNDAY OF YEAR C

The Lord's teaching to his disciples continues in the gospel passage from Luke today. A key aspect of the Old Covenant was God teaching his people the meaning of justice. Only by having first learnt the meaning of justice can Jesus then begin to teach his disciples the meaning of mercy which is a free gift that goes beyond justice and is something that we do not deserve.

The Lord's teaching today to love one's enemies, to do good to those who hate us, to bless those who curse us and to pray for those who treat us badly, moves beyond the '*eye for an eye*' and '*tooth for a tooth*' teaching of the Old Testament.¹ Here the Lord is asking us to go beyond what most people do, which is to only love those who love them and do good to those who do good to them. Rather, he wants us to imitate our Heavenly Father who is himself '*kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.*'

Such behaviour takes great spiritual maturity and a detachment to worldly things if we are to give to everyone who asks us, to lend without expecting repayment, and to not even ask for our property back from someone who robs us. It is most likely that Luke's community was a fairly affluent one, and so he is drawing upon the teaching of Jesus that asks us to share our abundance with those who have little. Indeed, while in Matthew's gospel Jesus says, "*Be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect*",² in Luke we find Jesus saying, '*Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate*'. Luke, then, is drawing out for his wealthier community the call of Jesus to empathise and suffer with those who are poor.

Jesus goes on: '*Do not judge, and you will not be judged yourselves; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned yourselves; grant pardon, and you will be pardoned.*' It is so easy for us to make judgements about people, especially those who may annoy or even hurt us, when we actually know very little about the reasons why they act as they do. As a priest, I have a privileged insight into people's lives that others may not have, as people come and open their hearts in confession or in times of conversation and prayer. Most of us carry hidden wounds, some going back to early childhood, that have affected the way in which we experience this life. A visual image may be of trying to view life through a distorted lens. Somehow, certain experiences and traumas in life have left their mark in our world of feelings, and there are certain situations that bring those powerful emotions to the fore once again.

It could be that someone has recently experienced a bereavement, or is in financial difficulties, or has an addiction of some kind. Maybe someone is exhausted from the demands of work or the daily challenges of raising a family. It could be that a person is worried about a loved one who is going through a particularly difficult time. Maybe a person is simply struggling with physical pain or with their mental health. Such examples may not be obvious to other people externally, but they can have a huge impact on a person's inner life and make it very difficult for them to be able to cope with normal everyday life.

The best policy I have learnt is to always give people who mistreat us the benefit of the doubt. We do not know what difficult hidden stresses or traumas they may be dealing with, and I'm sure that we have all experienced times when life's circumstances have got the better of us, and we have simply needed someone to listen and share a kind word with us. So as Jesus exhorts in today's gospel, '*Treat others as you would like them to treat you*' and '*Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate*'.

God bless,

Fr Andy

¹ Cf. Exodus 21:24.

² Matthew 5:48.