

SUNDAY 7 ORDINARY TIME YEAR A

Today's readings explain why we as Christians are expected to be holy and how we are meant to become holy people.

The 1st and 2nd readings give us reasons and the gospel gives us the way.

The 1st reading from Leviticus gives the holy code. *"Be holy for I the Lord am holy"*

This reading teaches us that we share God's holiness when we obey the two great commandments:-

From Moses. "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind."

And Jesus added:-

"You must love your neighbor as yourself"

I think it's only natural that when something happens to upset our apple cart we look for someone else to blame. I read that after the death of her Daughter in the London terrorist bombing in July 2005. Julie Nicholson resigned from her ministry as an Anglican priest because she felt unable to lead her congregation in the words of the Eucharist, when she was unable to forgive and was far from reconciliation.

When my wife died in 1994 at the age of 47 I looked around for someone I could blame, was it the doctors, Lorraine herself, her family background, even God Himself, but there was in fact no one.

Today's readings, though, show us the way to get on with our lives. Jesus is still continuing His sermon on the mountain and He stresses that blame, retaliation, or even limited vengeance, has no place in the Christian life.

It's true that graceful acceptance of an offence requires great strength and discipline of character as well as faith in God's grace.

Jesus wants us to repay evil with kindness.

Instead of retaliation Jesus lays down His precepts of acceptance, love, grace, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

He tells us to turn the other cheek.

If a right handed person strikes us on the right cheek they must use the back of their hand, for the Jews this was not just hurtful but also insulting. In this illustration Jesus tells us to forgive this insult gracefully and convert the offender.

Much of what Jesus teaches today is perhaps hard to understand and follow, it goes against our natural response. For instance He says go with him 2 miles.

Roman law permitted it's soldiers and other officials, to require people to carry a burden for them, sometimes a very heavy one, for a distance of one mile.

By suggesting an extra mile Jesus is in fact telling us that a Christian has a duty of responding, even to seemingly unjust demands, by helping or serving gracefully, not grudgingly. When we respond to an onerous duty with cheerfulness, rather than resentment, we may win over the one who gave us the duty.

The second part of today's gospel passage is perhaps, the central and most famous section of the sermon on the Mount. It gives us the Christian ethic of how to approach personal relationships"- Love one's neighbors and forgive ones enemies.

Jesus commands us that we are to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, to demonstrate that we are children of a merciful Heavenly Father.

The Greek word expressing love for our enemies is Agape, which is about the invincible benevolence of Good will for another's highest good. Agape is not a natural thing, practicing it is only possible with God's help, it's more about a choice rather than a feeling. We chose this because Jesus loves them so much that he died for them just as much as He died for us.

So today we see a clear message:-

We need to have a forgiving heart. Jesus demands this even where we are not loved in return and He tells us to pray for those who willfully cause us suffering, hardship and unhappiness.

And we should remember the words of Leviticus which remind us that we become perfect when we fulfill God's purpose in creating us, i.e. when we become Godlike by cooperating with His grace.

We become perfect when we try to love as God loves, to forgive as God forgives and to show unconditional good will and universal benevolence as God does.