

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time – February 19, 2017 – Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture Reading: Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18

The LORD said to Moses, “Speak to the whole Israelite community and tell them: Be holy, for I, the LORD, your God, am holy. “You shall not bear hatred for your brother or sister in your heart. Though you may have to reprove your fellow citizen, do not incur sin because of him. Take no revenge and cherish no grudge against any of your people. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.”

Psalm: Ps 103:1-2, 3-4, 8, 10, 12-13

R. (8a) **The Lord is kind and merciful.**

Bless the LORD, O my soul;
and all my being, bless his holy name.
Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits.

R. **The Lord is kind and merciful.**

He pardons all your iniquities,
heals all your ills.
He redeems your life from destruction,
crowns you with kindness and compassion.

R. **The Lord is kind and merciful.**

Merciful and gracious is the LORD,
slow to anger and abounding in kindness.
Not according to our sins does he deal with us,
nor does he requite us according to our crimes.

R. **The Lord is kind and merciful.**

As far as the east is from the west,
so far has he put our transgressions from us.
As a father has compassion on his children,
so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him.

R. **The Lord is kind and merciful.**

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 3:16-23

Brothers and sisters: Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person; for the temple of God, which you are, is holy. Let no one deceive himself. If any one among you considers himself wise in this age, let him become a fool, so as to become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in the eyes of God, for it is written:

God catches the wise in their own ruses, and again: The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain. So let no one boast about human beings, for everything belongs to you, Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or the present or the future: all belong to you, and you to Christ, and Christ to God.

Gospel: Matthew 5:38-48

Jesus said to his disciples: “You have heard that it was said, *An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.* But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one as well. If anyone wants to go to law with you over your tunic, hand over your cloak as well. Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go for two miles. Give to the one who asks of you, and do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow. “You have heard that it was said, *You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.* But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same? So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Prayer for a New Bishop

Heavenly Father,
You have blessed our diocese time and again with good and holy bishops who have led us ever closer to you. Aware of your profound love for us, we ask you to bless us once again. Send us a good and holy man to become our next bishop. Inspire us, the clergy, religious and the laity of the diocese to work generously with him so that we might grow together in your love and continue the good work you have begun in us for the sake of all. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

The human heart has its own commandments. In the First Reading, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” and, “Be holy, for I, the Lord, your God, am holy.” Agreed, but what does God’s holiness look like? The Responsorial Psalm puts it this way: *The Lord is kind and merciful. He pardons all your iniquities, heals all your ills. He redeems your life from destruction, crowns you with kindness and compassion.* A most comforting portrayal of God. We too can love this way, if we work hard enough. Can’t we? In the Gospel, Jesus gives his own guidelines. He quotes the old laws, as he did last week, and then he opens them up, giving us a view of their insides. • *Old rule*: “An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.” *New rule*: offer no resistance to one who is evil. ... If anyone wants to go to law with you over your tunic, hand over your cloak as well. ... Do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow.”

We are tiny ants compared to God.

Difficult, difficult. When I lived in California, some beggars admitted frankly that they had a quota to make before they could go home. And sometimes a large, expensive car would come pick them up at five or six pm! Surely this was a conspiracy. Should I have peeled off my coat to give to a syndicate? Maybe so. They were actually poor. I should not turn my back on the poor, should I? I had to crown them with kindness and compassion. Yet wouldn’t I be a patsy if I did? Help! • *Old rule*: “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” *New rule*: “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” The heavenly Father loves and rewards both the bad and the good, the just and the unjust. “Be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Really, isn’t that simply absurd? We are tiny ants compared to God, crawlers on boulders that flew loose in the big bang. How are we supposed to be as perfect as God? Jesus had better give us some very deep, compensating insights about the human heart and the laws that govern it!

And so he does. In the Second Reading he says, “You are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwells in you.” My interpretation: God builds the human heart with a hole in it, an openness that can let others in if we don’t block them out with selfishness. Especially when we let ourselves get used to it. We can even let God’s own self in! He will stretch our arms out to others so that we will truly give to them out of love. Alright, then should I give to a “beggar,” employed by a syndicate? Probably not. It is not for his good. Should a wife stay at home where her husband beats her up at regular intervals? No is the answer, because this is not a “giving, out of love,” it is trying to cuddle a rabid dog. A judgment has to be made in each case, but in general if the care is ethically and/or physically harmful to the giver or the receiver, it does not flow from God.

Real love is what we are after, the kind Jesus describes and which God pulls us toward.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. If we all “loved our neighbors as ourselves” do you think there would be wars, prisons, hunger and poverty? One way the Lord says to love your neighbor is, “You shall not bear hatred for your brother or sister in your heart. ... Cherish no grudge against any of your people.” Is this an easy thing to do? Have you tried it? Will you try again?
2. He also says “ ... for the temple of God, which is you, is holy.” And is your neighbor holy too? If this is so, do you treat all the people in your life as though they are holy temples?”
3. Why would Jesus tell you to “Love your enemies?” Who lives like that? Did Jesus show us a new revolutionary kind of acting when he showed us how to love our enemies? How far was he willing to go for them with his radical self-emptying? How far was the Father willing to go for his children?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another’s openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

Grant, we pray, almighty God, that, always pondering spiritual things, we may carry out in both word and deed that which is pleasing to you. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen