

Fr. Romeo Evangelista's Homily  
February 23, 2020  
The Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

In the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, an English Franciscan philosopher by the name of William of Ockham attempted to exalt the absolute freedom of God by saying that God can will anything, provided it is not contradictory. For instance, he can decree that hate is a virtue and that love is a vice. In other words, according to Ockham, the moral order is completely arbitrary: good and evil are determined only by what God wills them to be. And, to this day, a lot of Christians spontaneously think that way. When asked, for example, why we should love our enemies, tell the truth, respect other people's property, and so on, they answer: because such is the will of God. But if we ask them further question, "Why is it the will of God?" They either do not know what to answer or else, they answer, "Because he just decided it that way". But he could have decided the opposite, so thought Ockham. But this line of thinking is wrong. God commands nothing arbitrarily, by random choice, by capricious decision. What he commands merely reflects what he is. How he is pure love and he made us in his image and likeness. Being pure love, he expects us, his images, to become pure love like him. It is all as simple as that. This idea is expressed very well by Swiss Christian philosopher Francis A. Schaeffer.

"With the Christian answer it is now possible to understand that these are true moral absolutes. There is no law behind God, because the furthest thing back is God. The moral absolutes rest upon God's character. The creation as he originally made it conformed to his character. The moral commands he has given to people are an expression of his character. Human as created in his image are to live by choice on the basis of what God is. The standards of morality are determined by what conforms to his character, while those things which do not conform are immoral.

In today's gospel reading Jesus tells us, "Love your enemies, pray for your persecutors". Then he adds immediately afterwards the reason why we should love our enemies. Now notice that the reason which William of Ockham would give: because to love your enemies is the will of my Father in heaven. No, Jesus explains that by loving our enemies we only do what God does, nothing more. Jesus says, "this will prove that you are children of your heavenly Father,

for he makes his sun rise on the bad as well as the good, and sends down rain to fall on the upright and the wicked alike". In other words, God treats his enemies with the same care he gives his friends. And by doing so he is only expressing his nature, what he is. Being pure love, he acts accordingly. If we are his children, we share his nature in a sense. Children normally look like their parents and tend to imitate them, at least for a certain degree. So should we: as God's children we should look like him, that is, act as he does. That is what being holy and perfect in the eyes of God.

Apart from that basic reason that is the imitation of our Lord, there is another reason why we should love our enemies. This reason is a practical one. It has been spelled out very clearly by Nobel Peace Prize winner and martyr of the civil rights movement, Martin Luther King, someone who practiced what he preached.

"A reason why we should love our enemies", he writes, "is that love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend. We never get rid of an enemy by meeting hate with hate; we get rid of an enemy by getting rid of enmity. By its very nature hate destroys and tears down; by its very nature love creates and builds up. Love transforms with redemptive power". This is how God transformed the world and this is how we can also transform ourselves and others.

Christianity is the only religion which teaches the love of enemies. On this unique characteristic hangs its very essence. On it Christianity stands or falls. It is a difficult command, but we can fulfill it with God's grace, which is always offered to all of us.

My dear friends with the help of God's grace in our desire to imitate Him in every way, I believe we can be hold and perfect as our Heavenly Father is holy and perfect.

Amen.