

Fr. Romeo Homily
February 24, 2019
7th Sunday Ordinary Time (C)

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES:

Who among you here has or had enemies? Example – My own experience....

Naturally for most people, vengeance is an automatic, knee-jerk reaction. Getting even, settling a score, paying back is for them as natural as breathing. That almost universal form of behavior is what, in today's gospel reading, Jesus describes as the behavior of "sinners". And to that form of behavior he opposes something radically different, "Love your enemies", he says, "do good to those who hate you". These words of Jesus is a command to go beyond the standards of the world.

What is this loving our enemies all about? Here Jesus is not telling us to generate emotions of tender affection, feelings of positive regards towards those who mistreat us. Jesus is too wise a psychologist to do that. He knows perfectly well we do not have a direct control over our emotions. What he is telling us is to disregard our emotions and perform positive actions in favor of our enemy. Not once does he speak of feelings in this passage. All his examples refer to concrete actions. This trans-emotional behavior is reflected by the choice of the Greek verb we have here, the verb *agapáo* (used six times) which always expresses a love based not of feelings but on a decision of the will.

This decision to love always leads to another action, which is to forgive. One way of loving our enemies is to be able to forgive them. Someone said, "The best way to get even is to forgive", while Francis Bacon once said, "A man who studies revenge keeps his own wounds fresh". Our failure to forgive imprisons us to our past. As long as we refuse to forgive an offender for an offense committed against us, we are shackled to the past. Unforgiveness keeps that pain alive, keeps that sore open, and never lets that wound heal. Unforgiveness robs us of the job of living. On the other hand, forgiveness opens the door and lets the prisoner out. It sets us free from our past.

Why love our enemies? The Gospel gives us this, another compelling person: because our heavenly Father “makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and unjust”. God is absolutely even-handed and impartial in his gifts. We are his children and therefore should imitate him. He is compassionate – so should we be. Otherwise we will not deserve to be called his children. And whether our generous behavior is reciprocated or not doesn’t matter. We just follow our Father’s lead.

The purpose for which Jesus enjoins us to imitate our heavenly Father in this particular way is again quite simple: it is to be happy. Resentment and grudges can poison our lives if we allow them to get a hold on us. When we forgive, we are always free.

Jesus set an example by forgiving his enemies at the very moment they were nailing him to a cross. He practiced what he preached. As we are all reminded today in our gospel. Be merciful as our heavenly Father is merciful. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you.