

7th SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME YEAR C HOMILY 2022

Jesus' Sermon On The Plain Continued
More Than Reciprocity Or The Golden Rule

Lk 6.27-38

1Sam 26.2-23

1Cor 15.45-49

Who said this? *"Always forgive your enemies. Nothing annoys them so much."* (Great Irish author and wit Oscar Wilde). And this? *"Love is the only thing that can turn an enemy into a friend."* (Martin Luther King Jr). Is there something to learn here?

There seems to be a lot of unnecessary anger out there, locally and in the broader world. Over in Ottawa, Canada's capital, where I once lived for 3½ years, truck drivers have mindlessly blockaded the city centre 'Downtown', in protest at their so-called 'freedoms' being thwarted by COVID mandates for vaccination, which, from Pope Francis down has been described as a *'gift of love'*.

The trouble is that some, a very noisy minority, cannot see beyond their own selfish interests, if it could be called that, as vaccination is as much to protect the individual from serious illness, or even death, as well as the broader community. We should be thankful for the medical scientists who have skilfully been able to develop safe and tested vaccines in such a relatively short time.

Common sense should tell us that we have only been able to open up again with limited infections, relatively few deaths, and much reduced symptoms for those who catch it, which includes many of us, from what I can gather, because of the over 90% vaccination rate. Yet, there are still some, including the misguided (to put it mildly!) Archbishop of San Francisco down to some local priests, who have an anti-vax mentality, to the detriment of their ministry, as they cannot go into nursing homes or hospitals, nor many places of community gathering.

It not only doesn't make sense, but is irresponsible as I see it! I certainly don't see it as a private matter, nor of conscience. I happily said Mass at Trevi Court, with Margaret O'Brien helping, this last week, looking like a masked bandit (more like an astronaut before Christmas!), after we both passed our RAT test before entry!

Surely the good of the broader community, especially the most vulnerable, is the primary concern. Meanwhile, most of us accept this fact, and have seen the light and understood that vaccination is the way to go, in order for life to get back to some sort of normality. And very sadly, the issue has caused ongoing division and anger, even within families.

In this current context, I see today's Gospel as relevant, a continuation of Luke's interpretation of Jesus' Sermon on the Plain, we start with a repeat of the Golden Rule, a fundamental principle included as part of most of the world's religions, as well as a generally accepted humanitarian principle which a majority of well-intentioned agnostics and atheists would also see as important in living a good life: ***"Do unto others as you'd have them do unto you."*** It's a fair start to what we'd see as a way of surviving in the world, and having a way of getting on with others, particularly those who are different.

It seems to be very much a part of human nature that we find it easier to associate with those of our own type, in family, friends and community. Yet the reality of life for all us is that we need to move beyond the security of those limits, and engage with the broader world, and deal with our own limitations and those of others, and rejoice in our diversity.

As we've seen, Jesus starts with the locals, some of whom don't like what he has to say, because he takes this sort of line, where all are welcome to hear his words and see his actions, with the call to be a disciple as a result. He cuts straight through the legal and ritualistic requirements, whilst giving them their place, as he goes directly to the individual in need, and that amounts to everyone, in one way or another. It might start with physical needs, particularly for those who are poor, bereft, lost, downhearted or in grief, but then there are those who have more than sufficient for themselves, whose need is to look beyond self, as Jesus' injunction is to respond to serve the needs of others, and so meet our spiritual needs too.

Luke's reflection reaches a climax in Acts of the Apostles, where he writes of the early community pooling their resources in a common fund and then distributing fairly to all, so that responsibility for care of each

other is for all believers who have become disciples. It is not just about individual salvation of one's own soul, but finding one's salvation and fulfilment in service of others, as well as developing a growing relationship with God. Reflection and prayer are part of the picture, but not sufficient in themselves to satisfy Jesus' call.

Today, Jesus takes quite a leap forward in his call for genuine discipleship in stretching the imagination to suggesting that love of enemies is part of the deal.

I remember reading an item in the Weekend magazine "*The Two of Us*" some time ago, about a Palestinian and an Israeli father, who each suffered the horrific loss of a child in incidents relating to the ongoing hostilities in their territory. They had got together to spread a message of peace and good will, in a spirit of forgiveness of those who had perpetrated the tragedies, emphasizing the benefits of mutual acceptance of differences, and so a better and happier future for themselves and their families and generations to come. Again, it seems to be common sense, but not so easy to apply in practice. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, presided over by the late Desmond Tutu, was also an illustration of the possibilities of forgiveness and even love emerging, as a result of facing up to admission of and sorrow for past atrocities.

Yes, it's easy to hear Jesus speaking about the nice idea of loving enemies, but it's somewhat more difficult to live it out. It might be an ideal, but something to work towards, in making the world a more liveable and peaceful place, and our own lives happier as well.

Human history over the past 2 millenia certainly demonstrates that the Christian message has so often been lost in misinterpretation and misunderstanding. Yet, it is still at the heart of the Gospel we hear. Jesus' law of love includes a requirement for forgiveness and acceptance over resentment and retaliation. Luke is applying the teaching to his contemporary community, in interpreting the Beatitudes in practical ways, just as Paul does in his letters, particularly to the wild and woolly, class-conscious Corinthians, some of whom made the bad mistake of thinking Baptism was the gateway to salvation, with nothing more required.

Once again, common sense would indicate that faith and good works cannot be separated for the genuine disciple, according to the clear teachings of Jesus, in the spirit of the Beatitudes, from Luke's *Sermon on the Plain*, continued today. And so it is for you and me!

john hannon

20th February 2022