

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson
20th February 2022 - Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings (Year C): 1st: 1 Samuel 26:2. 7-9. 12-13. 22-23. Psalm: 102. 2nd: 1 Corinthians 15:45-49.
Gospel: Luke 6:27-38.

Bible Alive for today reminds us of GK Chesterton's saying that 'The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult and not tried.'

It is revolutionary teaching we have from Jesus today. Under the Old Covenant, loving one's neighbour meant loving everyone within the covenant family of Israel. Jesus widens the scope of charity in the New Covenant, commanding a radical love that reaches out to everyone, even our enemies.

Bible Alive continues 'It's relatively easy to talk about or give lip-service to ideals such as loving our enemies, not judging, turning the other cheek, and praying for those who mistreat us, but try doing these things when you actually have someone to forgive or indeed have an enemy who wants to harm you. It's not easy, is it?'

Bishop Robert Barron, in his Catholicism series says: "in order to understand this radical teaching we have to be clear on what Jesus means by "love."

Greek has several words for love: the word used by Jesus here in Luke, as in Matthew is '*agape*' a word free from erotic associations, and conveys the idea of a love that showed itself by helping its object rather than desiring to possess and enjoy it.'

Love is not a sentiment or feeling, not merely tribal loyalty or family devotion. Love is actually willing the good of the other as other.

Jesus does not ask his disciples to fall in love with their enemies – that would be wholly unrealistic. We can't like everyone!

The followers of Jesus are challenged to be determined about their enemy's welfare, to be stubbornly gracious, and to refuse to pay back violence with violence. Hatred can be defeated only by love: injury can be healed only by forgiveness; evil can be controlled only by goodness. That may not reflect conventional wisdom, but it is Jesus' wisdom in action. It was also David's response to King Saul's aggression.

The Christian's love is to be modelled on, and flows from, God's love. 'Life in Christ' is radically different from 'life in Adam.' The pattern of arrogant, even ruthless, self-assertion which is characteristic of man, gives place to the gentle, undemanding spirit of him who came 'not to be ministered to but to minister and give his life as a ransom for many.'

So Jesus exhortations here to give, to suffer, to serve, are simply encouragements to live as befits those whose life is 'hid with Christ in God.'

This whole new way of life is summarised in verse 36: 'Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate.' God not pressing his case against us. Reflected in the Psalm in which God pardons the sinner and redeems the situation, bringing good out of the apparent hopelessness.

If we believe this, then we are challenged to reflect it in our relationships with others. Loving our enemies doesn't mean ignoring everything that others do to us. It primarily means not allowing ourselves to be drawn into enmity. If someone fights against me as an enemy, I mustn't react in an equally hostile way. Otherwise the enmity of the other person will become my prison.

In his own life Jesus had to work hard at honouring his own ethic. That process was not a painless or bloodless affair; it cost Jesus everything.

He offered love first, even though he knew that the return would ever measure up to what was offered; he never bargained love for love; he never became involved in stock-taking returns. Above all he made a habit of confusing his enemies with love.

Jesus expects us, his followers, to share the gifts of grace we have received. Jesus is the higher gift than grace: Love itself of God, who is love.

Love creates its own reality, its own force of goodness. It enables us time after time, to refuse the offer of putting a spear through sleeping victims.

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