

Holy Spirit Province

PROVINCIAL NEWSLETTER

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LIVING THE GOLDEN RULE: 7TH SUNDAY C

We are followers of Jesus. He has set the bar for our behaviour as high as can be (Luke 6:27-38). Love your enemies, he insists. Do good to those who hate you. Pray for those who treat you badly. Don't hit back. Don't condemn. Treat others as you would like them to treat you. This is the Golden Rule. Be merciful, forgiving, compassionate, generous and kind.

Do we take him seriously? Jesus himself did just what he said. He practised what he preached. He welcomed and forgave the woman who had a bad name in the town (Lk 7:47-49). He healed the ear of one of those arresting him (Lk 22:51). On the cross he prayed that his executioners might be forgiven (Lk 23:34). He taught us to pray for forgiveness for our own sins, and to be ready to forgive any wrongs done to us (Lk 11:4). In short, Jesus repaid evil with goodness.

Centuries before Jesus, one of his ancestors David had shown similar generosity of heart towards his jealous rival, King Saul (as we learn in our First Reading today). Despite the fact that Saul was out to kill him, David refused to harm the king, for Saul had been chosen by God to lead the people, and so David left Saul's fate to God. All through history other people have practised that kind of mercy, goodness and generosity:

At the end of the Second World War, when the Nazi death camp of Ravensbruck was liberated, a prayer on a scrap of dirty paper was found next to the body of a dead child. This is what it said:

O Lord, remember not only the men and women of good will, but also those of ill will. But do not remember all the suffering they have inflicted upon us; remember the fruits we brought, thanks to this suffering, our comradeship, our loyalty, our humility, the courage, the generosity, the greatness of heart which has grown out

of this; and when they come to judgment, let all the faults which we have borne be their forgiveness. AMEN.

A religious sister was raising money for the poor in an anti-Catholic part of America. After her talk a mild-looking old man walked up to her. Expecting a donation she held out her hand. He spat on it. She coolly wiped her hand, held it out again, and said to him, 'OK, that's for me. Now, what do you have for Christ's poor?' In 1989 in San Salvador, six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter, were murdered. On All Saints' Day, their families and friends gathered in church to mourn their losses with prayer. They painted the names of the victims on cards, surrounded the names with flowers, and placed the cards on the altar. One prayer-card was without flowers. But it read: 'For our enemies.' Later, a man spoke up in defence of that card: 'Because we are Christians, we believe that our enemies should be on the altar too. Even though they kill us, they are still our brothers.' On May 13th, 1981, Mehmet Ali Agca, intending to kill, shot and wounded Pope John Paul II in St Peter's Square. After his recovery the pope went to the prison to forgive his assailant. In the Philippines, a young woman called Maria went to work in a home for homeless boys. She was asked to interview three out of the forty boys there. After one hour she came back to her supervisor, looking flushed and distressed. The first boy she interviewed, she said, could not be reunited with his father as his father was in prison for murder. The supervisor explained that several boys were on the streets because their parents were in prison and not to let it upset her too much. 'Yes,' replied Maria. 'But I have just discovered that the man his father murdered was my own father.' After they both recovered a bit from that shocking news, the supervisor said. 'Well, perhaps you might like to drop that boy from your case-load or relocate to another facility?' But Maria stood her ground. 'I am a social-worker,' she said, 'and I am also a Christian. It's not this boy's fault that his father killed my father. I think I would like to help him as much as I can.'

But why would Jesus teach and expect such goodness and mercy? He says simply: 'Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate (v.36).' It's a matter of the imitation of God, of acting like God, a matter of 'like Father, like child!' So no matter what another does to us, we must seek nothing in return but their good. Yet loving is not the same as liking. *Liking* is about how we *feel*, and we don't have control over our feelings. But we do have control over how we *act*. So, says Jesus, do no evil, do no harm, even to those who deserve it. Love like God. Replace their darkness with your light.

To love like that, however, does not come easy. It involves going against very basic human instincts – the desire to get even, and the fear of being taken advantage of. But with God’s grace to help us, while it’s not easy, it’s still possible. In fact, it’s in our own interest to love like that. People who hate are in great pain and great need. In their book *How to Forgive your Ex-Husband*, Marcia Hootman and Patt Perkins highlight the enormous energy and money some women waste trying to get even with their ex-husbands, and how they hurt themselves far more by their anger than by what they got from their former spouses.

The secret to success in living better this particularly challenging teaching of Jesus is surely prayer, and so let us conclude this reflection by saying: ‘Good and kind God, only with the help of your grace can we love as you love. Give us the strength to overcome anger with love, ugliness with beauty, and evil with good. We make this through Jesus, our Leader and our Lord. AMEN.’

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