

## **Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time C/2007**

Suppose a young man who has killed another person, and because of his crime, is brought to justice. As he comes to court, he suddenly finds himself in the presence of his mother and the judge. How will both, the judge and the mother, react vis-à-vis this criminal? I assume the judge, in his duty and obligation, will try to apply the law as impartially as he can, so that justice may be done. I assume, also, that the mother, driven by her love for her son, and placing herself above any law, will react with compassion and hope that extenuating circumstances can be found to the case of her son.

These two attitudes symbolize two different logics, namely that of human beings and that of God. For human logic, there is nothing else to do in the presence of evil than to stop it or to destroy it. In order to do so, the wicked should be punished, the wickedness eradicated and justice established. The process that leads to the stoppage or the eradication of evil can go from simple justice, to self-defense and even to revenge. God's logic, on the contrary, is built up on compassion, love and forgiveness. It does not mean that God does not see the evil-doing; but he gives always to the evil-doer and the wicked a new chance so that they may change and come to conversion. If they miss such an opportunity, they can take out only on themselves.

Today's readings confront us with these two logics and challenge us to make wise choices in our lives as we face conflicts and adversities. In the first reading, David, inspired by religious convictions, chooses to forgive and to spare the life of Saul, who was threatening to kill him. The main reason that pushed David to do so is that he considered Saul as the anointed of the Lord. He saw in him more than a mere human being, even if he was guilty of jealousy and envy.

In other words, in each person, God is present; he is present even in a criminal that the whole society rejects for his wickedness. A man, even if guilty, is still an anointed of the Lord, that is, a son and daughter of God, worthy of being loved and protected in his rights. God has created him or her in his own likeness. For that reason, there is more good in him than the bad he can do.

All that helps us better understand the demands Jesus sets for his disciples and for us alike, in today's Gospel. For Jesus, in fact, there are four imperatives that should guide the conduct of his followers when they are confronted with evil, namely love, goodness, prayer and blessing.

In fact, Jesus does not ask us to fall in love with our enemies, which would be unrealistic. Rather he challenges us to be determined about our enemies' 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 is totally the opposite of our social and cultural ways of considering things. And yet, that is the logic of Jesus, the logic of the kingdom of his Father and our Father. If we want to possess that kingdom, this is the path Jesus sets before us.

Why Jesus is asking his followers to love their enemies, to forgive the bad done to them without seeking revenge, and to be generous to everyone? First of all, the disciple should put himself in the place of the other and evaluate how he would react if it was he who has hurt people or acted wrongly toward someone. Would not he expect to be forgiven? Or in need would not he expect to be helped? Thus, Jesus can say, “Do to others as you would have them do to you”.

The second reason is the importance of Christian identity. Being Christian is not being anyone; it should make a difference in our life and around us. The disciples of Jesus cannot behave like any other people with regard to any situation in which they are involved. Jesus says it very clearly: If you love only those who love you, what credit is that to you? – If you do good only to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? – If you lend money only to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Do not sinners do the same?

The third reason is the example of our heavenly Father who is kind, generous and merciful to each one of his children. If God could judge us, who would survive? The way God treats us should inspire us in our behavior toward one another. In other words, Jesus is inviting us not to put conditions to our love or to our generosity, or to our forgiveness of others. We must love and forgive like our Father, without condition; God acts like the mother who believes that her son can change in spite of the crime he has committed.

The fourth reason is the principle of reciprocity. Human cynicism and ingratitude pushed aside, it is clear that the measure we use in judging people, or in giving, or in forgiving, is what comes back to us in turn. If we are open and generous to people, it is possible they do the same to us. If we are mean and unforgiving, it is possible that people do the same with us. Is not this a warning?

Let me finish by raising this question: Is what Jesus asking of us impossible? Let us remember that the Gospel is not given for heroes or supermen. It is for those who have a filial heart and trust in God. It is only by imitating God that we can live out of Jesus’ logic. Human beings, like us, have tried in our century to live out of these principles and have succeeded. Think about Gandhi, M. Luther King, and N. Mandela.

Jesus is asking us to love, that is, not to look on one’s rights, but to the needs of others. He invites us to restrain from any kind of violence even verbal, to look for forgiveness. He wants us accept the others even if they have done wrong. That can be truly difficult, but it is not beyond us. That is why we must pray. Only prayer can dissolve aggressiveness, disarm hearts, communicate the sentiments of our Father who is in heaven, and give the force that stems from the love of God. May God bless you all!



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