

## Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time A2023

Let me start this homily with an old proverb that says, "Like father, like son", "Like mother, like daughter". The same proverb is found in the book of Ezekiel 16: 44. Beyond the cliché that this proverb hides, what it highlights is mostly the similarity both physical and behavioral that parents have with their children.

What the proverb presents here as a biological reality because of the presence of genes in an individual and the proof of DNA, the Scriptures present it as an appeal from God, our Heavenly father. As God exhorts the chosen people through the mouth of Moses, "Be holy for I, the Lord, your God, am holy."

To be holy and resemble God requires, as the first reading suggests, to get rid of hatred, to restrain from revenge, to abandon grudges, and love the neighbor as one's self. By doing so, those who believe in God will be like him. They will resemble him because they will not act on their own way, but rather in godly manner, with magnanimity, mercy and benevolence.

In a very practical way the Gospel shows what acting in godly manner looks like. But, before entering into details, Jesus opposes the so called law of proportionality or law of retaliation to the principle of the imitation of God. What is it about?

The law of retaliation appeared for the first time in the Code of Hammurabi, the king of Babylon. It stipulated that if a person has injured another, he should be given an equivalent of the pain he inflicted on the other. That law was considered as an attempt in the application of justice and the beginning of mercy in so far as it tried to limit the blindness that could come from vengeance.

Like many societies of the time, to prevent vengeance or retaliation, Israel adopted the law of proportionality. Israel accepted that the punishment to be given in case of bad behavior should be proportionate to the committed fault. That explains the maxim "eye for eye" and "tooth for tooth" Jesus is talking about. That principle, however, instead of establishing true justice was, in fact, a type of permitted revenge. Because if one who broke the leg of another has to have his own leg broken, what kind of justice is it?

For Jesus, whatever might be the aim of that law and its beneficence for the life of people in society, retaliation, even controlled, has no right in Christian morality. What fits the Christian behavior is the spirit of non-resentment and non-retaliation.

To show the relevance of that reasoning and how the people of God should behave, Jesus gives a couple of examples taken from the life of Israel. The first example refers to non-resistance when facing insult, humiliation and despise. In fact, when two opponents were face to face and one would like to slap the other on the right cheek, the only way to do so was to strike him with the back of the hand.

According to the Jewish tradition, to hit someone with the back of the hand was twice as insulting as to hit him with the flat of the hand. In that case, then, the point of Jesus is that even if someone should insult us in a deadly way, we should never retaliate.

The second example is about the non-claim before the legal rights. In fact, a Jew had two types of garments: the tunic and the cloak. The tunic was the main dress and anyone could have many. The cloak was a robe that was worn by day and used as a blanket at night. Of such garment, a Jew would have just one.

According to the Jewish law, a tunic could be taken away as a pledge and not the cloak. By proposing that both might be taken away, Jesus would like to tell us that we should not dispute about our rights. Instead of claiming our legal rights and privileges, we better think of our duties and responsibilities.

The third example Jesus refers to is about tolerance toward a compelling master or the needy. It was common at that time that the occupying power pressured the Jewish people at any time to provide the services it needed for its benefice. Jesus says that even in such a compelling case, as Christians, we should never serve with bitterness, but always gladly, with the only concern of helping others.

The last example Jesus gives is about the love of our enemies. This is a tough one, but not impossible to do. Let me explain. To enter Jesus' vision, one needs to distinguish filial love from marital love. What is that? Filial love is that which exists between children and their parents, and the marital love is what exists between the spouses. The feeling that drives the filial love is affection. It is deeply rooted in the human heart so that no one can help loving his own children. The feeling that drives the marital love is passion. It is rooted in the human heart to the point that no one can help falling in love.

When Jesus talks about the love of enemies, it is not about filial or marital love. The love of enemies is an act of the will. One needs a little bit of goodwill in order for it to happen. One has to bring in not only one's heart, but also one's head, so that it might be conquered over the natural instinct of resentment against the enemies.

Still, why is Jesus asking us to love our enemies and pray for our persecutors? First, there is the example of God himself. He does not make a distinction between the criminal and the innocent. He makes the sun rise on the bad and the good alike. He causes the rain to fall on the just and unjust. Those who believe in him should behave like him.

Second, there is the problem of the truth about ourselves. In fact, as human beings, we all make mistakes toward others and, even, sin against God. However, we all want people to forgive us and God to grant us his mercy. If that is the case, we should do the same thing with our enemies and persecutors.

Third, there is the difference between us and the pagans. As Jesus said, people should look at our deeds and glorify God. If our deeds cannot be different from those of pagans, then, there is a problem with our faith. That is why Jesus wants us to be different and act differently. Following our Father, it is our duty to love not only our enemies, but also to pray for our persecutors. Prayer, when it is done in the spirit of Jesus, is powerful. It is impossible to pray for someone and still hate him. Any serious prayer makes a difference in our life and in our relationship with others. It is only in that way that we can be like God. Otherwise, there is no difference between us and the pagans.

Let us ask Jesus to help us understand that we are the temple of God. And for that reason, we have to imitate our Father in heaven by loving our enemies and persecutors. God bless you all.

**Leviticus 19: 1-2, 17-18; 1 Corinthians 3: 16-23; Matthew 5: 38-48**



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