

Sunday Message

SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

THE WORD

Year C • 23 February 2025 • Psalter Week 3

THE GOLDEN RULE

LUKE 6:27-38

Today's Gospel is from Jesus' Sermon on the Plain, Luke's version of Matthew's Sermon on the Mount. It is Jesus' vision for how his disciples are to live.

There are two major themes in the section we read today. The first is a teaching on love of enemies. The second is a call to imitate the compassion of God the Father.

Jesus gives four practical examples of love of enemy. The first is how to respond to verbal abuse. If someone curses a disciple of Jesus, they should not meet it with another curse but with a blessing, perhaps even with a word of praise. When they are treated badly, they should respond by praying for those who mistreat them. When it comes to physical ill-treatment, if struck on the cheek, they must not retaliate but turn the other cheek.

The third area has to do with property. Jesus begins with an example – the theft of one's clothes. Clothing in his time was relatively simple. Underwear consisted of a strip of cloth used as a loin-cloth. Over this was worn a light garment, like a long tunic or shirt, tied at the waist with a belt or sash so that the loose ends could be tucked up when at work. In cold weather or when travelling, a heavier

woollen cloak was worn that could double as a blanket when required. If a robber demanded the cloak, the disciple was not to fight to retain it but to offer even the tunic as well.

The fourth example concerns borrowing and lending. Disciples are to give to anyone who asks and not even to expect the return of stolen property.

Now Luke gives what has been called 'the Golden Rule' – treat others as you would like them to treat you. This teaching is not exclusive to Christianity. Rabbis, even before Jesus' time, taught a version of it. It was known to religious teachers in China and India, and to philosophers in Greece and elsewhere. It is probably the highest pinnacle of human wisdom and its common sense cannot be doubted.

But Jesus' teaching goes a step beyond it. The call is not so much to treat people in the way you expect to be treated but to reach into God's utter compassion for God's creation and to imitate that. Everything Jesus said and did was a living out, a repetition, of the Golden Rule. Imagine the kind of world we would have, and the relationship between peoples and nations that would exist, if we all lived according to the Golden Rule. ■

DO

Reflect on today's Gospel. If you were in court and this Gospel was a charge sheet assessing how successful you are at following Jesus, what would the verdict be?



PRAY

Pray for an increase of harmony between peoples and nations, for an end to violence and conflict.

SAY

"Lord, help me to live by your Golden Rule. When I fail, help me to pick up the pieces. Amen."

LEARN

The Christian must live by the Golden Rule: Treat others as you would like them to treat you.

REFLECT

To live according to the Golden Rule is not easy, as we know. The vision of Jesus is at odds with how the world operates. It turns the standard way of behaving upside down. For all the progress humankind has made, for all our advances in technology and science, for all our development in human rights, we still have a lot of evolving to do if we are to live like Jesus.

Eight decades after the Holocaust, anti-semitism is increasing again, especially after the war in Gaza. In Ireland, more than half of immigrants say they experienced racism in the past year.

Today, there are more displaced people than at any time since the Second World War, while millions of women are trafficked into sex slavery annually. Bullying, domestic violence, homophobia all remain as rampant

as ever. Social media has facilitated an explosion of hate speech. To adopt Jesus' vision is to change how we behave. It is to treat everyone as we would like to be treated.

Second, Jesus asks us to keep returning to his vision, to never give up. Of course, we will fail. Of course, we will behave in shameful ways. Of course, we will rush to judge and to condemn and treat badly. We do these things because we are human, after all. We give into selfishness, anger and tribalism because we are frail, broken and imperfect. But Jesus knows this. The challenge is to brush ourselves clean every time we fail. To never give up trying to live his way.

In the 1980s, civil war raged in Nicaragua. The left-wing Sandinistas eventually claimed power. The Sandinistas had a lot of support in the Church from those who believed the Church should be actively on the side of the poor. One Sandinista

government minister was a Catholic priest, Fr Ernesto Cardenal. The Vatican disapproved of his political activism, and when the Pope visited Nicaragua in 1984, a famous photograph shows him wagging his finger at Cardenal, who is kneeling before him for his blessing. Cardenal's faculties were removed, and he could no longer function as a priest.

Fast forward to 2019 and another photograph. This time, Cardenal, now 94, is in a hospital bed. He is dressed in priestly garments and is celebrating Mass. Pope Francis has restored his priestly faculties, treated him with compassion. In the photograph, the old man is at peace. Happy.

The message of Jesus in today's Gospel is clear: let love be our guiding motive; let mercy dictate all we do; treat others as we would like to be treated. Seek, like Jesus, to turn our broken world upside down. ■

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

*O Lord, I trust in your merciful love.**My heart will rejoice in your salvation.**I will sing to the Lord who has been bountiful with me.*

COLLECT

Grant, we pray, almighty God,
that, always pondering spiritual things,
we may carry out in both word and deed
that which is pleasing to you.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

FIRST READING 1 Samuel 26:2. 7-9. 12-13. 22-23

A reading from the First Book of Samuel.

In those days: Saul arose and went down to the wilderness of Ziph with three thousand chosen men of Israel to seek David in the wilderness of Ziph.

David and Abishai went to the army by night. And there lay Saul sleeping within the encampment, with his spear stuck in the ground at his head, and Abner and the army lay round him. Then Abishai said to David, 'God has given your enemy into your hand this day. Now please let me pin him to the earth with one stroke of the spear, and I will not strike him twice.' But David said to Abishai, 'Do not destroy him, for who can put out his hand against the LORD's anointed and be guiltless?' So David took the spear and the jar of water from Saul's head, and they went away. No man saw it or knew it, nor did any awake, for they were all asleep, because a deep sleep from the LORD had fallen upon them.

Then David went over to the other side and stood far off on the top of the hill, with a great space between them. David said, 'Here is the spear, O king! Let one of the young men come over and take it. The LORD rewards every man for his righteousness and his faithfulness, for the LORD gave you into my hand today, and I would not put out my hand against the LORD's anointed.'

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Psalm 103(102):1-2. 3-4. 8. 10. 12-13. R. 8a

R: The LORD is compassionate and gracious.

1. Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and all within me, his holy name.
Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and never forget all his benefits. *R.*
2. It is the Lord who forgives all your sins,
who heals every one of your ills,
who redeems your life from the grave,
who crowns you with mercy and compassion. *R.*
3. The LORD is compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger and rich in mercy.
He does not treat us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our faults. *R.*
4. As far as the east is from the west,
so far from us does he remove our transgressions.
As a father has compassion on his children,
the LORD's compassion is on those who fear him. *R.*

SECOND READING 1 Corinthians 15:45-49

A reading from the First Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians.

Brothers and sisters: 'The first man Adam became a living being'; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

ACCLAMATION BEFORE THE GOSPEL John 13:34

R: Alleluia, alleluia.

A new commandment I give to you, says the Lord,
that you love one another, just as I have loved you.

R: Alleluia.

GOSPEL Luke 6:27-38

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

At that time: Jesus said to his disciples, 'I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who begs from you; and from one who takes away your goods, do not demand them back. And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.'

'If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.'

'Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.'

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

As we celebrate your mysteries, O Lord,
with the observance that is your due,
we humbly ask you,
that what we offer to the honour of your majesty
may profit us for salvation.
Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

*I will recount all your wonders,
I will rejoice in you and be glad,
and sing psalms to your name, O Most High.*

Or

*Lord, I have come to believe that you are the Christ,
the Son of the living God, who is coming into this world.*

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Grant, we pray, almighty God,
that we may experience the effects of the salvation
which is pledged to us by these mysteries.
Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.