

Trinity 6, 2022

“Love your enemies.” (St. Luke 6.27)

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Once again in the Gospel, as He did two weeks ago, the Lord Jesus presents a very direct word about the Christian life and the kingdom of Heaven. “Love your enemies,” He said “do good to them which hate you, bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.” It is a direct word and it is a radical word. But it is a word that reveals the merciful heart of God, and it points us to the Way of the Cross, and the Way of everlasting Life..

The background for today’s Gospel goes all the way back to the Book of Leviticus. Specifically, in the Book of Leviticus, God instructed Moses to tell the Israelites this: “You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.” However, upon hearing the emphasis on “*your own people*” and “*your neighbor*” some of the religious leaders began to teach wrongly by saying: ‘If we are to love our neighbor, then we must hate our enemy’.

The Lord Jesus flipped that wrong assumption upside down with His message two weeks ago of a merciful heart. Likewise, from that same chapter in Luke, there is the word from today’s Gospel: “Love your enemies, and do good and lend, expecting nothing in return...Be merciful as your Father also is merciful”. (6. 35-36)

One of the things – one of the key things -- we are meant to understand is that those who have been baptized into Christ are meant to live differently. Think about what happens with me when someone is baptized, please. Promises are made by the person if they are an adult, or by their parents and God parents if they are a child. And the first of those promises involves renouncing/rejecting the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world, with all covetous desires of the same, and the sinful desires of the flesh, so that you will not follow or be led by them”.

To covet (covetousness) according to one dictionary is “an insatiable desire for worldly gain”. Before someone is baptized, they renounce this desire. They acknowledge it to be contrary to, and an impediment to, following the Lord Jesus Christ. In that promise, we acknowledge the lure and the temptations that the devil uses to draw us away from God. He is always trying to hook us with material possessions and with the possibility of ‘more’ – more money; more influence; more time off; more comforts; more conveniences. But as followers of Christ, we believe that nothing can satisfy our deepest needs more than the love of God in Christ. The Baptism Service makes this clear: in Baptism we are adopted into the family of God. He makes us “members of Christ”. In other words, as a human body has many members – hands, feet, legs, arms, eyes and ears, so He joins us to Himself (invisibly but truly) through the work of His Spirit in Baptism. As any child who is adopted takes the last name of their parents, moves into the family home, and shares in every aspect of the family life, so we actually become God’s very own children. He also sets aside an inheritance for us – an eternal inheritance – one that will last forever. As the Prayer Book says, we are made inheritors of the Kingdom of Heaven. So what *more* could there possibly be?

Nothing that the world has to offer can come anywhere near the abundant gifts God has poured out upon us through His Son. But let’s pause here for a minute: if all that is true, and it is, we have received a share in

the life of God Himself. We have been adopted as His children; we have made a member of Christ, and an inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven. The Holy Spirit has come to live in us. Therefore, by God's work, we become different people in Baptism.

This exactly what St. Paul is talking about in today's Epistle. I would like to invite you to look at it with me, beginning on page 226. "Do you not know," he says "that as many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted with Him in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection."

Paul is talking about the death and resurrection of Jesus; but then he begins to talk about the benefits of Jesus' death and resurrection which go to those who are baptized. Let's go back and re-read those lines again. ...

Now, let's go back for a third time to the last line on page 226..."that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life". We should walk in newness of life. The Lord Jesus Christ has come to live in us through His Holy Spirit, so we should live differently. And that means loving our enemies.

The thing is, Christ came from Heaven and was born of the Virgin Mary in order to give His life for us on the Cross, as the perfect Sacrifice for our sins and the sins of the whole world. And we all know, that while He hung there, His precious Blood streaming down, Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." He forgave His enemies, and showed us the way of the new life.

Near the end of today's Gospel, Jesus said, "If you love those who love you, what credit (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 credit 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."

He made His point very clearly: the new life; the Christian life is different from the way of the world. It is a radical way of living. It is radical because it is empowered by the Holy Spirit. We belong to God. We have been adopted as His children. Christ Jesus Himself lives in us by His Spirit and we have been changed. We have been changed, we are being changed and we will be changed.

A final thought: if we reject the Lord Jesus and resist the change His Spirit yearns to bring, He will leave us to our own devices and the benefits received at of our Baptism will be lost forever. Therefore as Paul said, let us reckon ourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And now unto God Almighty: the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost...