

Homily. 7th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Year. A. 18/19 February 2023.

Last weekend I spoke to you about the inner moral law Jesus taught, a code of ethical behaviour going deeper within us and reaching out further beyond us than do laws and rules and our compliance or otherwise to them. I said to you then that even with our best efforts we often falter and fall. This is why the greatest sign of our faith is to be found in mercy and forgiveness; the key point of Jesus teaching, the centre of the Lord's Prayer, the heart of the Cross and the core of every Eucharist we share. I added that, without God's forgiveness of our trespasses and ours of those who trespass against us, laws, legalism and rules are all we've got left.

It's to this inner moral urge that Jesus directs us today, a new way of acting and living. Moving beyond a slavish adherence to laws and rules, going deeper than the scribes and Pharisees ever did with their legalism and law abiding pride while looking down on others who missed the mark by either their choice or circumstance, brings us to admit the frailty of our humanity. The options at this point now are limited; either that the entire effort to be good and virtuous is an enterprise doomed to failure by our selfishness, or that mercy and forgiveness must have the final victorious word. Needless to say in Jesus, God reveals that the last word ever spoken to us is one of acceptance and absolution. Yet, as always, God respects our freedom and choice. Mercy and forgiveness of our selfish faults and evil sins is freely offered to us, but the willingness to accept or reject our need and welcome this unconditional loving gift is ours to make.

In trying to do what Jesus asked of us we have to put ourselves openly before God from whom all creative, compassionate and healing love

flows. We call this honest, trusting openness, prayer; real prayer which arises from our hearts, our need and our faith. We pray like this for our enemies and for those who hurt us, as well as for ourselves and for those we have hurt and offended. Only after such honest, faithful prayer, being strengthened in the experience of God's merciful love for all, can we then cultivate the mind of God within us, a mind that makes the Sun to shine on bad and good and the rain to fall on just and unjust alike.

With and in this loving Spirit we can choose to act differently towards those who use us, impose upon us, persecute us and set themselves against us. This is because we've realised that they, too, are loved by God, the kind, ever patient Creator of all who, with all of our differences has made us members of the one human family on this one beautiful, fragile planet. The experience of God's mercy and forgiveness of us frees us to choose to do likewise with each other, even with our enemies.

Failing or refusing to act in this better way clearly serves only to confirm and deepen what divides us, prolonging the endless cycle of punishment, revenge, bitterness and bloodshed that we know full well is destructive and evil. In short, this reactive way is that of eye for eye and tooth for tooth, the old law, not the way of God's love which is the only perfection to which we are all called in this life. Nor is such a reactive, vengeful way that of the Opening Prayer of the Mass wherein we prayed that God help us to carry out in word and deed that which is truly pleasing to the Lord.