

Reflection for the 7th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Cycle C

The lectionary translation of the readings for this Sunday can be found at <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/022325.cfm>

1st Reading: *1 Samuel 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23*

The setting for this reading is that king Saul, the first king of Israel, disobeyed God and God decided to replace him. He had Samuel anoint David when David was still a youth. David became an armor bearer in Saul's army and, during this time, slew Goliath. Later he became a Captain in the army became more famous than Saul; the people would sing "Saul killed thousands while David killed 10's of thousands. Saul became jealous and set out to kill David. David went into hiding. Saul found out that David was hiding in the desert and set out, with his army, to find him. They stop to rest for the night and our selection begins here.

2nd Reading: *1 Corinthians 15:45-49*

In last week's selection Paul told the Corinthians that if they don't believe in the Resurrection of the Lord, their faith was in vain. This week he deals with the resurrection of the body and says we will get a spiritual body back. It will be bodily but like Jesus' resurrected body.

Gospel: *Luke 6:27-38*

"But to you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you." Lk 6:27-28

Gospel Reflection

I have a friend with whom I talk on a relatively regular basis. We talk about the Church, about Scripture, about holiness, about the problems of aging, and about what's going on in the world today... Yeah... Sometimes, in that part of the discussion, we resort to name calling or ad hominem attacks on people in the news. I'm embarrassed to admit that... It's hugely immature, but it's true. I do that. He and I usually agree with each other, so it's not like were arguing or anything. But I don't think it's good for either of us. It dredges up plenty of negative feelings.

I think it is important to note that, in our country, we are a people who are pretty evenly divided, 47% to 51%, about the current direction of our country. And when I say divided, I mean divided! I know people who have ended twenty-plus year relationships over it and many families live with the difficulty of part of the family thinking one way and the other part thinking differently. Sometimes they dread getting together on those special holidays. What are we supposed to do? How are we supposed to act?

Well, our Gospel selection for today says that we are supposed to love our enemies. Wait... Am I suggesting that those who politically, or ideologically, disagree with us in these days and times are our enemies? I think the answer is yes, not because of any external realities, but because of the way we react to, and act toward, those others. I don't think it matters what side of the issue we take. I think if we are aware of the issues, and take one side, we act as if those who take the other side are the enemy. And, I think we need to claim that reality. So, again, what do we do?

Here are a few suggestions. It's what I'm trying in my life and, right now, it's all I've got:

First, I'm committed to disavowing hatred. Some people say "I don't hate anybody." That's great if it is true. I don't think I hate anybody but I still catch myself thinking "Well, now they are getting what they deserve," or "They will eventually get what they deserve." That's edging into hatred. In its most basic form, hatred is simply wishing evil on the other. Anytime we notice that we are doing that, we need to stop and ask God to show us how to love that person.

Second, I'm trying to develop compassion. For me, an effective way of letting go of hatred for someone is to develop compassion for them. It helps me to ask what the other person has suffered, or is suffering, in their life that causes them to think and act the way they do. If I can connect with the other person's suffering, it is often easier to connect with the real person they are behind their words and actions. And I don't mean to say that we need to discover things like they are suffering because of the price of eggs, it's deeper than that. Eggs are just a symbol which keeps us a safe distance from the emotion it symbolizes.

Third, I think I've developed a good working theory for what healthy love is. For me, healthy love is desiring, and living for, the good of the other person. We use this kind of love when we properly discipline children as a way of helping them develop their own self-discipline. Love doesn't have to always feel warm and cozy, but it does always have to be directed toward the good of the other.

So there it is.

First, learn to identify and disavow hatred. We need to identify our own hatred; and stop judging other people. Our hatred doesn't harm the other, it only harms us.

Second, develop compassion for the other. We need to discover why the other thinks, feels and acts the way they do. We need to try to understand the person behind the words and actions. Dig deep enough to find the person that is lovable.

Lastly, we need to have a working theory of how to love the other with whom we disagree so vehemently. We need to figure out how to be Jesus' loving presence to them.

Finally, the question remains; do we need to engage the person with whom we disagree so vehemently? That's a tough one. I think maybe at times we need to love from an appropriate distance. But, if we do engage, we should probably not ask questions which imply a particular answer but rather ask questions that invite the other to think more deeply about the issue you are discussing, a question wherein the two of you might be able to find an appropriate answer together.

You have my prayers. God bless you all...

Personal Reflection:

"But to you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you." Lk 6:27-28

Question:

What words or phrases grabbed your attention during the Liturgy of the Word on Sunday? What connection do those words or phrases have to your day-to-day life? (Why do you think they grabbed your attention?) What might God be trying to say to you through these words or phrases? What response should you make? What action should you take?

Alternative:

Reflect upon/Share about someone (don't give any identifying information) who treats you poorly. Do you characterize that person as a friend, acquaintance, or enemy? What makes it hard for you to love them? What would have to change, in you, for you to be able to love them?

Verse by Verse:

Note that this is still part of the Sermon on the Plain where Jesus is speaking from a "stretch of level ground."

Lk 6:27a "To you who hear" | = to you who understand.

Lk 6:27b "Love (*agape*) your enemies..." | AYBC states that, in the context of the Blessings and Curses, "enemies" here means enemies of Christianity. But, it seems to me that it should be taken generally as it is presented in Mt 5:44a.

The Greek word used for "love", here, is *Agape*, which is the kind of love God has for human beings and the kind of love human beings have for God. It stands in contrast to *philia*, which is usually thought of as brotherly love. *Agape* sets a high bar.

Lk 6:27c "...do good to those who hate you." | Jesus calls for a love that includes action.

Lk 6:28a "...bless those who curse you..." | the Greek word, *eulogeō*, used here means to say something which includes a desire for some positive result for the other person. An example might be "I pray that everything works out for you." It is, obviously, the opposite of uttering curse.

Lk 6:28b "...pray for those who mistreat you." | This does not mean that you pray for them to become what you want them to be but that they might experience goodness in their lives and become what God created them to be.

Lk 6:29-30 "to the person who strikes you... from the person who takes your cloak... Give to everyone who asks... do not demand it back." | These also exist in Matthew (Mt 5:38-42) in a slightly different form.

Lk 6:36 "Be merciful..." | This word means be compassionate. Is this command a summary of everything which come before as Matthew's Gospel is. Mt 5:48 ends with, "So be perfect..." (To understand Matthew's comment takes and exegesis of it's own.)