

We are now on the 3rd week after Pentecost and the theme for this morning is "Evil can only be overcome with good." As we look at the world around us evil seems to be progressing from bad to worse. Every day when we read our newspapers violence seems to be on the increase including groups that are preparing for violent attacks on other communities as seen on the television recently. There seems to be a polarizing of religious communities and also violence against the Christian communities seems to be on the increase. Wherever there is violence the world teaches us to seek revenge and to get even with those who do evil to us. It is all about retaliation and revenge. However Jesus teaches us a non-retaliation ethic of the Kingdom of God.

In the reading from the gospel according to Saint Luke Jesus teaches us that evil can only be overcome by good. He teaches us something which goes against the grain of common understanding. Disciples are called to love their enemies and do good to those who hate them. How difficult is this teaching? It is easy to love those who love us but it is very difficult to love those who hate us. Hate can come from outside the faith community. Within the community hate comes because of jealousy and outside because people are ill informed. But in both cases the source is the evil one. Satan always wants to break communities and societies by stirring up hatred against the other and by creating an atmosphere of fear. Jesus tells us to bless those who curse us and pray for those who mistreat us. So what happens if we follow his instruction or if we don't?

When Jesus calls us to love our enemies and to do good to those who hate us or to bless those who curse us and to pray for those who mistreat us he calls for a non-retaliatory ethic. Retaliation carries on the cycle of physical and verbal violence. If we choose not to retaliate then we act as a sponge absorbing all the violence and not letting it go beyond us. When we do not retaliate and we bless those who curse us or hurt us then we are showing something of the love of Christ to that person. Our prayers then are that, they too would know the love of God. Jesus gives us a supreme personal example. His very first words on the cross after the brutal violence that had been done on him was, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." And so in the first section there is this fourfold call. First to love your enemies. Second to do good to those who hate you. Third to bless those who curse you. Fourth to pray for those who abuse you.

Jesus then moves on to give four practical illustrations. In the first illustration he says that if someone strikes you on one cheek then you are to turn the other. Slapping the person with your back hand was twice as insulting to a Jew. Turning the other cheek means that we are called not to engage when someone strikes us. Rage can easily take the better of us if we retaliate. We hear of road rage when an MLA's son shoots a young man for overtaking his car. Jesus calls us to be different just as he was willing to go to the cross we too are called to be ready to suffer. Secondly he talks about another situation where if someone asked you for a cloak they were asked to give their tunic as well. The point is that one should give freely beyond what one is asked. In the third illustration, he talks about giving generously to those who beg. Give generously to everyone who asks you. We find it difficult to give generously to everyone who asks us and we come up with various excuses as to why we can't do it and in the final illustration he talks about not demanding something that belongs to you which is being taken by your own neighbor. In all these illustrations what Jesus tells us goes against the very grain of our selfish human nature so the call is actually a call of radical love through which evil can be broken.

Jesus tells us that if we love only those who love us then we are no different than the people of the world. We would only be doing what anybody else would do. The world is willing to give credit to those whom they know will pay back. The credit card system itself operates on that. So Jesus is saying there is no difference between a money lender and us because we do the same. There needs to be an ethical difference in our lives.

Jesus then sums up this teaching by saying that we are to love unconditionally we are to do good and lend without expecting anything in return. When we do this our reward will be great. Our reward is a deeper connection with God. We will be reflecting the character of God if we do this. God is kind to the ungrateful and wicked and so we are called to do likewise. We are to be merciful just as our heavenly Father is merciful. May God truly help us overcome evil with good.