

7th Sunday Ordinary Time Year “C”

February 19-20, 2022

Readings: 1 Samuel 26: 7-9, 12-13, 22-23; 1 Cor. 15: 45-49; Luke 6: 27-38

I think that one would be hard pressed to find a more challenging phrase from the pages of Sacred Scripture than “...love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.” It strikes at the very core of the human experience. Many struggle to avoid feelings of hatred in their lives, whether directed at people, institutions or inanimate objects! “I hate vegetables,” “I hated that movie.” “I hate politics.” Sometimes, we all exaggerate a bit.

“Do good to those who hate you.” Does the word ‘hatred’ really have much meaning any longer? Synonyms for the verb “to hate” (v.) include loathe, abhor, detest, or have an aversion to something or someone. St. Thomas Aquinas addressed the topic of hatred in his *Summa Theologica*.¹ Regarding our natural appetite, each thing is attuned and adapted to that which is suitable– this is natural love. Each being has natural dissonance from that which opposes and destroys it; this is natural hatred.²

For us humans, love is that which is attuned to what is suitable; hatred is dissonance of the appetite from that which is seen as repugnant and hurtful. Evil becomes the object of hatred. He taught that nothing is hated except through it being contrary to a suitable thing which is the object of love. In other words, love comes first.

When we do not know any better, we have no reason to hate. Small children demonstrate this, absent any reason not to love. When I served as a chaplain on a cruise to Antarctica, I observed this first-hand in nature, We were told not to approach the penguins– just stay put and observe. They were not afraid of humans. As slow as these animals are intellectually, their intelligence senses danger. As they were not the object of attacks from humans, there was no fear of us.

¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II Q. 29, art. 1

² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II Q. 29, art. 2

Aquinas notes that properly speaking, anger is directed to an individual thing, whereas hatred can be directed to a thing in general. The example Aquinas uses is that of the sheep who “hates” the wolf universally.³

Applied to ourselves, being angry with a parent, spouse or sibling is quite different from saying that we hate them. We can’t fall into the trap of casually throwing around such a powerful word, lest we equate hatred of spinach with hatred for our family or neighbor. Jesus ends all doubt- we are to love our enemies, a fundamental truth about human existence.

We all exist because God willed it- he holds us in being. God by His very nature is Goodness. He cannot create evil; it is entirely against his nature. Thus, we can never hate what God has created. Taken to its logical conclusion, the hatred of another is the equivalent of abhorring what God has created. Hatred for a another is a sin that kills the heart.

This is contrary to the fifth commandment, and rightly classified as a mortal sin. To be clear-we can hate evil, for it is the very absence or privation of the good. God created Lucifer, an angel who, exercising free will turned against God-becoming the devil. This is very different from hating the evil that someone commits, or the sin you yourself commit.

A generation ago, some concluded that the Church had spoken too much about sin, that the Gospel was too negative. In speaking about love, some of these same people- perhaps unwittingly- effectively watered down the meaning of sin through the silence of their words.

We need to seek holiness and virtue together. We priests need your good example as singles, married couples, widows and widowers, young and old alike. You motivate me to seek holiness to a greater degree in my life. And together we all benefit from the Church leading us, not only in sound doctrine, but also through the beautiful seasons of the liturgy.

³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II Q. 29, art.6 (quoting Aristotle, *Rhetoric* ii, 4)

With Lent just around the corner, we have before us the best opportunity all year long to stop our “business as usual” and consider what might be. I humbly suggest that we start preparing now. Make plans so that you can hit the ground running when Ash Wednesday arrives.

“Give, and gifts will be given to you...overflowing, pouring into your lap.”

This is God’s promise to His faithful. We pray for the grace to remove any vestige of hatred from our hearts, trusting that God’s gift of grace can heal the wounds brought about by sin.

The Book of Samuel teaches us today that the Lord reward each person for his justice and faithfulness. Let us take the Lord at His word and concentrate now on doing our part.