



Bringing Home the Word

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
February 23, 2020

Accentuating the Positive: Easier Said than Done

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

Hate is a passion that can take over a person's heart in a short amount of time. God knows this, and he challenges us to avoid hate and holding grudges. In the law that Jesus preached, we are not even allowed to hate our enemies or persecutors. That is radical!

It is easy to let injuries build up over time. Eventually we find ourselves far away from those we should be closest to or those we once loved. This separation starts in our thoughts and settles into our

hearts and behavior. Hate grows, and if it isn't controlled and redeemed, it can pull us down.

We don't have to hate, be angry, or carry grudges if we don't want to. Our hearts and minds can be filled with God's grace. We can work on three levels to overcome hate and anger: visual, verbal, and physical. When angry thoughts invade your mind, look up (visual), speak the truth to yourself (verbal), and change your posture (physical). This helps alter self-destructive thought patterns and helps us refocus our heart and mind. Add these natural means to the supernatural means of calling on God's grace, of receiving the sacrament of penance, and of taking moments of prayer to see and speak his truth over a situation.

We are God's temple. His spirit of peace, mercy, and serenity needs to reign inside us. That means getting rid of negative, hateful, and hurtful thoughts toward ourselves and others. Don't let them pull you down! +

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Sunday Readings

Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18

You shall not hate any of your kindred in your heart....Take no revenge and cherish no grudge against your own people.

1 Corinthians 3:16-23

Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

Matthew 5:38-48

[Jesus said,] "Offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on [your] right cheek, turn the other one to him as well."

A Word from Pope Francis

One of the essential characteristics of this vocation to perfection is the love of our enemies, which protects us from the temptation to seek revenge and from the spiral of endless retaliation....Those who evangelize must therefore be first and foremost practitioners of forgiveness, specialists in reconciliation, experts in mercy.

—Homily in the Central African Republic, November 29, 2015



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Which passions weigh down my heart?
- How can I use human and spiritual means to point my heart and mind in a healthier, God-focused direction?

How Can We Love Our Enemies?

By Fr. William H. Shannon

“Love your enemies,” Jesus says in Luke 6:27. *What in the world was he thinking about? Why, there are times when I have trouble loving some of my friends! How can I possibly be expected to love my enemies?*

If that’s what you’re thinking, you have lots of company. To reflect prayerfully about these strong words of Jesus, let me point out that this command is one of four different love commands in the Gospels.

First, there is the general Christian responsibility to “love God above all and your neighbor as yourself.” Then there is the general Christian responsibility to “love your neighbor as yourself.” Then there is the command that relates the disciples of Jesus to one another. Jesus says, “This is my commandment: love one another as I love you” (John 15:12). Finally there is the command that calls for a love that includes everybody. It’s not enough to love friendly neighbors or other disciples. We must love without limits. For Jesus says: “I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44).

The first two commands make sense. Peace and harmony in family and society come from loving those we are close to. The disciples’ loving of one another,

though demanding at times, also makes good sense. For Jesus’ disciples are called to imitate him. But “Love your enemies”—a command—doesn’t seem to make any sense at all. It seems to go against fundamental principles of justice and the duty we have to love ourselves and not allow ourselves to be victimized by others.



Jesus Gives Us No Wiggle Room

The maddening thing is that this central teaching of Jesus is so all-inclusive.

It allows us no wiggle room. We cannot choose which enemies we will love and which we will not. Nor can our love be simply an attitude. We have to act. We must do good to them even if they hate us. We must ask God’s blessings for them even if they curse us. We have to pray for them even if they mistreat us.

The love Jesus calls us to is unconditional. It brooks no ifs. It’s a love that says, “I love you, no matter what you do or say, for you are the image of God.”

Finding All of Our Sisters and Brothers

There’s a story about a rabbi who was discussing with his disciples the difference between day and night: “When,” he asks, “does the night end and the day begin?” One disciple replies,

“Is it the moment when you can tell the difference between a sheep and a dog?”

“No,” the rabbi answers, “it isn’t that.” Then peering deeply into their eyes, he says, “It is the moment when you look into the face you have never seen before and recognize the stranger as a sister or brother. Until that time comes, no matter how bright the day, it is still night for you.”

That is a moving story, but we have to take it a bit further. We have to be able to look into the faces of neighbors we have seen and responded to with anger, impatience, ill will. To look into the face of such people and see a sister or brother: This is the kind of unconditional, nonviolent love to which Jesus calls each of us. +

The love Jesus calls us to brooks no ifs. It’s unconditional.



Lord, you command me to love my neighbor. May your love dispel the hatred and resentment in my heart so that I may love all people unconditionally.

—From *Peaceful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

February 24–29

Monday, Weekday:
Jas 3:13–18 / Mk 9:14–29

Tuesday, Weekday:
Jas 4:1–10 / Mk 9:30–37

Wednesday, Ash Wednesday:
Jl 2:12–18 / 2 Cor 5:20—6:2

Thursday after Ash Wednesday:
Dt 30:15–20 / Lk 9:22–25

Friday after Ash Wednesday:
Is 58:1–9a / Mt 9:14–15

Saturday after Ash Wednesday:
Is 58:9b–14 / Lk 5:27–32

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