



Bringing Home the Word

Seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time (A)
February 19, 2023

Be Perfect

By Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA

Wow, that's a tall order! But what does perfect mean? The Greek word means "full" or "complete." In the first reading, Leviticus calls us to be holy, a word with cultic allusions—to be set apart to be used for God. Though not possessing exactly the same sense, there is a connection between perfect and holy, for to be set apart to be used for God will certainly make us perfect, fulfilled, and complete. So what does Jesus mean when he tells us to be perfect, as God is perfect?

Continuing our reflection on the Sermon on the Mount, we find Jesus telling us how we are to be perfect as

God is perfect. He offers two examples of extraordinary behavior. The Mesopotamian code of Hammurabi states "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." The punishment may not exceed the crime. This was a step forward in ancient justice.

Jesus said that this is not enough. There is to be no vindictiveness, no revenge, regardless of how equivalent it might appear. The reason for this is that God loves and cares for all, even those who do us injustice. God makes the "sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust" (Matthew 5:46). In this way, we must be like God; we must love all, no exceptions. This is what it means to be perfect. It is indeed a tall order. But it is the way to be fulfilled, to be complete. †

A Word from Pope Francis

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. This is the Christian innovation. It is the Christian difference. Pray and love: this is what we must do; and not only with regard to those who love us, not only with regard to our friends or our own people. The love of Jesus knows no boundaries or barriers.

HOMILY, BARI, FEBRUARY 23, 2020



Sunday Readings

Leviticus 19:1–2, 17–18

Be holy, for I, the LORD your God, am holy.

1 Corinthians 3:16–23

For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in the eyes of God....

Matthew 5:38–48

[Jesus said,] "Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you....Be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect."

*God loves and
cares for all, even those
who do us injustice.*



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- As Lent begins this week, is there someone I need to forgive?
- Is there someone from whom I need to ask forgiveness?



(continued from last week)

Part V

If the Gospel of John is to be believed—and it is—Jesus judges no one. God judges no one.

That needs to be put into context. It doesn't mean there aren't any moral judgments and that our actions are indifferent to moral scrutiny. There is judgment, except it doesn't work the way it is fantasized inside the popular mind. According to what Jesus is quoted as saying in John's Gospel, judgment works this way: God's light, God's truth, and God's spirit come into the world. We then judge ourselves according to how we live in the face of them: God's light has come into the world, but we can choose to live in darkness. That's our decision, our judgment. God's truth has been revealed, but we can choose to live in falsehood, in lies. That's our decision, our judgment to make.

So then, this is how judgment

Justice, Mercy, and the Nature of God

By Fr. Ron Rolheiser, OMI

happens: God's spirit (charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness, and chastity) has been revealed. We can choose to live inside the virtues of that spirit, or we can choose to live instead inside their opposites (self-indulgence, sexual vice, rivalry, antagonism, bad temper, quarrels, drunkenness, and factionalism).

One choice leads to a life with God, the other leads away from God. And that choice is ours to make. It doesn't come from the outside. We judge ourselves. God judges no one. God doesn't need to.

Part VI

There comes a point in life when our spiritual struggle is no longer with the fact that we are desperately in need of God's forgiveness, but rather that God's grace and forgiveness is overly lavish, unmerited, and especially that it goes out so indiscriminately.

God's lavish love and forgiveness go out equally to those who have worked hard and to those who haven't, to those who have been faithful for a long time and to those who jumped aboard at the last minute, to those who have had to bear the heat of the day and to those who didn't, to those who did their duty and to

those who lived selfishly.

God's love isn't a reward for being good, doing our duty, resisting temptation, bearing the heat of the day in fidelity, saying our prayers, remaining pure, or offering worship—good and important though these are.

God loves us because God is love and God cannot *not* love and cannot be discriminating in love. God's love, as Scripture says, shines on the good and bad alike. That's nice to know when we need forgiveness and unmerited love, but it's hard to accept when that forgiveness and love is given to those whom we deem less worthy of it, to those who didn't seem to do their duty. It's not easy to accept that God's love does not discriminate, especially when God's blessings go out lavishly to those who don't seem to deserve them. †



Loving God, we are called to forgive those who hurt us. When we are tempted to make exceptions, remind us that we are forgiven much. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

The Redemptorists

This reflection is an excerpt from *Daybreaks: Daily Reflections for Lent and Easter* by Fr. Ron Rolheiser, OMI, available now from Liguori Publications. Visit Liguori.org to learn more and review our complete list of *Daybreaks* authors, including Fr. Byron Miller, CSsR; Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA; Fr. Daniel Horan, OFM, and others.

WEEKDAY READINGS

February 20–25

Monday, Weekday:
Sir 1:1–10 / Mk 9:14–29


Tuesday, Weekday:
Sir 2:1–11 / Mk 9:30–37

Wednesday, Ash Wednesday:
Jl 2:12–18 / 2 Cor 5:20—6:2 / Mt 6:1–6,
16–18

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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