



## SUNDAY GOSPEL

### *Love Your Enemies*

*Matthew 5:38-48*

Jesus said to his disciples: 'You have learnt how it was said: Eye for eye and tooth for tooth. But I say this to you: offer the wicked man no resistance. On the contrary, if anyone hits you on the right cheek, offer the other as well; if a man takes you to law and would have your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone orders you to go one mile, go two miles. Give to anyone who asks, and if anyone wants to borrow, do not turn away.

'You have learnt how it was said: You must love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say this to you: love your enemies and pray for

those who persecute you; in this way you will be children of your Father in heaven, for he causes his sun to rise on bad men as well as good, and his rain to fall on honest and dishonest men alike. For if you love those who love you, what right have you to claim any credit? Even the tax collectors do as much, do they not? And if you save your greetings for your brothers, are you doing anything exceptional? Even the pagans do as much, do they not? You must therefore be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect.' ■

## GOSPEL REFLECTION

*Fr. Michael J. Dyer*

Many scripture scholars agree that the radical teaching to "love your enemies [rather than hate them] and to pray for those who persecute you" is unique to Jesus! Pope Francis in his message for the Celebration of the Fiftieth World Day of Peace on 1 January 2017 echoes Christ's sentiments: "I offer heartfelt wishes of peace to the world's peoples and nations, to heads of state and government, and to religious, civic and community leaders. I wish peace to every man, woman and child, and I pray that the image and likeness of God in each person will enable us to acknowledge one another as sacred gifts endowed with immense dignity, especially in situations of conflict. Let us respect this, our "deepest dignity" *and make active nonviolence our way of life.*" We pray for the grace we need to honour the divine spark within us. Let us turn our cheeks, sacrifice our tunics and cloaks, refuse to turn away from the needy and lend selflessly, especially to those we fear and from whom we can expect little or no kudos. In other words, let us 'make active nonviolence our way of life'; this is the path to perfection, *aka* Heaven. ■

## A WORD FROM POPE FRANCIS



In the well-known Sermon on the Mount, which opens with the Beatitudes, the Lord teaches that perfection lies in love, the fulfillment of all the precepts of the Law. Whilst Matthew uses the word 'perfect', in this same perspective, St Luke specifies that perfection is merciful love: to be *perfect* means to be merciful.

Is a person who is not merciful perfect? No! Is a person who is not merciful good? No! Goodness and perfection are rooted in mercy. Certainly, God is perfect. However, if we consider Him in this way, it becomes impossible for us to aim towards that absolute perfection. Instead, having Him before our eyes as merciful, allows us to better understand what constitutes his

perfection, and this spurs us to be, as He is, full of love, compassion, mercy. I ask myself: are Jesus' words realistic? Is it really possible to love like God loves and to be merciful like He is?

If we look at the history of salvation, we see that the whole of God's revelation is an unceasing and untiring love for humankind: God is like a father or mother who loves with an unfathomable love and pours it out abundantly on every creature. Jesus' death on the Cross is the culmination of the love story between God and humanity. A love so great that God alone can understand it. It is clear that, compared to this immeasurable love, our love will always be lacking. But when Jesus calls us to be merciful *like* the Father, he does not mean in quantity! He asks his disciples to become *signs, channels, witnesses* of his mercy.

The Church can be nothing other than a sacrament of God's mercy in the world, at every time and for all of mankind. Every Christian, therefore, is called to be a witness of mercy, and this happens along the path of holiness. Let us think of the many saints who became merciful because they allowed their hearts to be filled with divine mercy. They embodied the Lord's love, pouring it into the multiple needs of a suffering humanity. Within the flourishing of many forms of charity you can see the reflection of Christ's merciful face. ■

### TALKING POINTS

1. The first few lines of this gospel passage are quite radical – walk the extra mile, offer the other cheek, give to all who ask! How do you respond to Jesus' challenge here? Why do you think Jesus puts this challenge to his disciples and followers?
2. Peacemaking is the ultimate goal of 'loving enemies'. Is this true in your life and in what ways have you been called to be a peacemaker within the relationships of your life? Who are the 'enemies' where peace is needed?
3. As Pope Francis indicates, we are called to imitate as best we can the perfection of merciful love. In what ways have you experienced this merciful love in your own life and what has been the result?

### PRAYER POINTS

**Pray for each other:** Ask about and pray for the needs of the group members. Individuals might pray for themselves or ask someone else to pray for them.

**Reflect:** Spend some time with Jesus asking him for the strength to grow and improve in one area of your life this week.

**Response:** *Lord Jesus, show us your mercy and love.*

**Closing Prayer:** Heavenly Father, you call us to imitate your merciful love, especially to those who may be our enemies. We pray for them and for ourselves that your merciful love will be a source of healing and transformation.

