

GOSPEL

LUKE 6:27-38

Jesus said to his disciples: 'I say this to you who are listening: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who treat you badly. To the man who slaps you on one cheek, present the other cheek too; to the man who takes your cloak from you, do not refuse your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and do not ask for your property back from the man who robs you. Treat others as you would like them to treat you. If you love those who love you, what thanks can you expect? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what thanks can you expect? For even sinners do that much. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what thanks can you expect? Even sinners lend to sinners to get back the same amount. Instead, love your enemies and do good, and lend without any hope of return. You will have a great reward, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.

'Be merciful as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged yourselves; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned yourselves; grant pardon, and you will be pardoned. Give, and there will be gifts for you: a full measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, will be poured into your lap; because the amount you measure out is the amount you will be given back.'

The Gospel of the Lord.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Jesus sets a high standard for our behaviour. Do you think people today perceive the Christian reaction to bad circumstances as being a sign of strength or weakness? Why?
2. In laying out the model of how real love responds to situations, Jesus is showing us how he loves us. What has your experience been of Jesus' love, mercy and forgiveness?

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

We have often heard the passage from the Gospel of Luke "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful". It is not a catchphrase, but a life commitment. To understand this expression well, we can compare it with the parallel text from the Gospel of Matthew, where Jesus says: "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect".

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?

Mercy is expressed, first of all, in forgiveness: "Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven" (v. 37). Jesus does not intend to undermine the course of human justice, he does, however, remind his disciples that in order to have fraternal relationships they must suspend judgment and condemnation. Forgiveness, in fact, is the pillar that holds up the life of the Christian community, because it shows the gratuitousness with which God has loved us first.

Jesus also indicates a second pillar to us who are his Church: "to give". Forgiveness is the first pillar; giving is the second pillar. "Give, and it will be given to you.... For the measure you give will be the measure you get back" (v. 38). God gives far beyond our merits, but He will be even more generous with those who have been generous on earth. Jesus does not say

what will happen to those who do not give, but the image of the "measure" is a warning: with the measure that we give, it is we who determine how we will be judged, how we will be loved. If we look closely, there is a coherent logic: the extent to which you receive from God, you give to your brother, and the extent to which you give to your brother, you will receive from God!

Merciful love is therefore the only way forward. We all have a great need to be a bit more merciful, to not speak ill of others, to not judge, to not "sting" others with criticism, with envy and jealousy. We must forgive, be merciful, and live our lives with love.

REFLECTION QUESTION

- What has struck you from this reflection by the Holy Father?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God
4. Prayer for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.