

7C SML 2019
LK 6:27-38

For Freud, the command to love one's enemies belongs to a *credo quia absurdum est* "I believe because it is absurd!" Jesus's command to love one's enemies is so radical it can take your breath away. Yet this teaching is as central as it is radical: radical in that it requires us to be as merciful, as perfect as the Father, and central in that you just can't get away from it. This teaching is found at every turn. Add to the litany of teachings offered in today's gospel:

- ✓ The Our Father's "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us"
- ✓ That Jesus taught we should offer forgiveness not only once, not even seven times but seventy-seven times, that is without limit.
- ✓ That Jesus illustrated this demand in the parable of the unforgiving servant.
- ✓ The parable of the prodigal son
- ✓ The parable of the lost coin and lost sheep
- ✓ Jesus offered His forgiveness on from the cross. "Father, forgive them. They do not know what they are doing."

- ✓ The deacon and martyr Stephen expressed this same plea as he was being stoned and was dying.
- ✓ Paul in Romans (3:25), Romans (5:10), Colossians (3:13) and Ephesians (4:32) call us to model Jesus' necessity to forgive
- ✓ And a long list of church fathers who wrote on the necessity to forgive: from Clement to Ambrose, Augustine and Aquinas just to name a few.

As God would have it, this past Thursday, February 21st, the Church celebrated the feast day of St. Peter Damian. The breviary has this to say about Peter Damian:

During calamitous times he helped the Roman Pontiffs through his works and writings and by various missions on behalf of Church reform . . .

Since the Church is currently going through calamitous times and is in need of reform, I googled what Peter Damian worked and wrote about - the sexual abuse of minors and prepubescents by clergy. How timely.

In his correspondence with the Holy See, Peter Damian asked another future saint, then Pope Leo IX, four questions:

1. Is one who is found guilty of these crimes to be expelled irrevocably from holy orders? Today, the answer would be, defrocked, meaning he would never again be able to act

or present himself as a priest. Laicized? To be determined. Remember from the Baltimore Catechism or your Confirmation questions there are three sacraments that come with a sacramental character, an indelible mark on your soul: Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders. So while there is nothing one can do to make one “unbaptized” or “unconfirmed,” one is necessarily “unordained” unless he were laicized.

2. Whether at a prelate’s discretion, one might mercifully be allowed to function in office? Today, the answer would be no.
3. To what extent, both in respect to the methods mentioned above and to the number of lapses, is it permissible to retain a man in the dignity of ecclesiastical office? Today, the answer would be none.
4. Also, if one is guilty, what degree and what frequency of guilt should compel him under the circumstances to retire? Today, the answer would be once.

It appears that whenever Holy Mother Church has had a great need for a special kind of saint, for a particular age, God in His infinite mercy, has never failed us to fill that need. I have no reason to think God will fail us now.

However, until that saint is identified, and he may already be known among us, we need to rely on Gospel values as taught by Jesus. If Jesus’ teaching on forgiveness is absurd,

as Freud claims it is, we can counter this claim with the question, “Where do we get if there is no pardon and no forgiveness, when we repay every wrong done to us with a new wrong, taking an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth, or in the current crisis, castration?”

Taking all the horrific atrocities that have been experienced over the centuries, the problem of forgiveness and love of enemy has acquired a sad new currency, and has led to a much needed rethinking. And after thinking this through, it has become abundantly clear that however much mercy, forgiveness and pardon are superhuman acts, and even absurd to some, they are nonetheless highly sensible in the end.

To act as if “it” (whatever “it” may be, a victim in the current crisis, whatever), to act as if “it” never happened, or to act as if “it” never hurt, that is what would be absurd. Some of us have been truly hurt and deeply hurt by others. And likewise, some of us here have truly hurt and deeply hurt others. So let’s talk about loving from a distance, forgiving from a distance.

To forgive someone doesn’t mean to pretend that it didn’t hurt, or to return to a state that they could hurt us again,

especially if they don't understand how deeply they've hurt us in the first place. How many times have I heard, "Father, I've tried to explain this to them, and they just don't get it." Alright ...

To forgive in those circumstances, can simply be boiled down to this. To say about the one who has deeply hurt me, "He doesn't owe me anything anymore, not even an apology. I don't need an apology to forgive him. It would be nice, but I don't need it." Because this does not even require that they get it, or that you get the last word (which you won't). It doesn't even require that there be a confrontation. All it requires is you admitting to yourself that they don't owe you anything. It requires that you forgive from a distance. And the only way you'll be able to say that, and mean it, is by grace.

I have spoken to victims in the current crisis and have asked them, "What can I say, either here, one on one, or from the pulpit, to help you heal?" And she said, "There's nothing you can say. Just pray for the victims." So my prayer for victims is huge. My prayer for those who have a huge grudge, I pray they will someday forgive.

There are few things in life more difficult than forgiving someone who has really hurt us. And yet, God's grace from the

the Eucharist, is a grace that is able to do just that, to forgive, and it is extremely freeing when we do.

This particular grace is what you and I are about to receive when we walk down these aisles and receive from this altar, the precious Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus, the new and eternal covenant, for the forgiveness of sins. That's why we receive the Eucharist, for the forgiveness of sins, to receive the grace to forgive sins. You do this to remember me. When you forgive sins, you remember Me, when you remember that I have forgiven your sins.

And it's this grace that can take a *credo quia absurdum est* "I believe because it is absurd!" to *credo quia rationabile* "I believe because it is sensible!"