

My Dear people of God,

Today we celebrate the Seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time. The message of discipleship continues to be presented to us.

In the gospel reading this Sunday, we hear difficult and challenging words from Jesus to His disciples: **“Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you and pray for those who mistreat you”!** This is perhaps one of the most difficult lessons to learn in the area of forgiveness i.e. forgiving those we consider our enemies or those who have wronged us. The good news is that, while it may appear difficult or even impossible the first reading gives us a perfect example to follow.

In the first reading, we hear an account of Saul going after David whom he perceived as his enemy. But by the grace of God, he was instead delivered into the hands of David. Faced with that predicament, Abishai one of David’s army commanders, gave David what you would call the traditional ‘wisdom of war’, that is; **“Kill, nail and spear your enemies before they do the same to you.”** In other words, do unto others before they do unto you! David however, being a man after God’s own heart (1 Sam 13:14, Acts 13:22) rejected Abishai’s advise and said; **“..Today though the Lord delivered you into my grasp, I would not harm the Lord’s anointed.”** That is a perfect illustration of the instruction from Jesus to His disciples then, and to us today.

It is no coincidence that today in the context of these readings, I find myself on the second and last week of the pilgrimage in San Giovanni Rotondo, the home of Padre Pio who is probably one of (if not) the most popular saints in modern times. His popularity usually surrounds his stigmata (*the wounds of Christ he bore*), his ability to be in two different places at the *same time (bi-locate)* or his ability to read people’s souls. However, what is many times forgotten or not much attention paid to is how he patiently dealt with all those who were opposed to him and his ministry or rather those who persecuted him. If they were his superiors, he still respected and obeyed them recognizing them as his legitimate superiors and followed their orders. If they were his brothers, he loved them and readily forgave their unkind words or actions.

My dear brothers and sisters, transformed by the power of the resurrection, we too are not only called to, but are capable of unprecedented good works, works of mercy. Yes, we can live without retaliation, rendering good for evil. Furthermore we can be prodigal in our generosity towards others; we can relinquish any rights of proprietorship we might enjoy. Yes, we can live with others without unfairly judging them. We can be and are called to learn to be like God our father who is boundless in forgiveness.

When we are transformed, we are able to live the greatest commandment- i.e. the command to love God and our neighbor. Then we become true children of God and God becomes the source of our spiritual power, the model after whom we pattern our own lives. In that way, the works themselves are not mere external performances done out of obligation, but out of a motive of pure love. Those acts of love are then visible manifestations of a deep inner reality of a transformation that has taken place in our lives. Schooling for discipleship as in the gospel today results in total transformation in Christ Jesus.

My dear brothers and sisters, love within one's group or fellowship is a natural and universal human trait. What makes disciples of Jesus Christ different from other people is their ability to love those outside of their own group or fellowship and even their enemies. Jesus stresses the obligation of fraternal charity that His disciples are to imitate in order to manifest the kindness and compassion of God.

As we continue on our journey faith, let us strive to be compassionate, forgiving and generous towards one another.

Thanks and God bless,

Fr Simon Peter