

7th Sunday- A 2011
Deacon Pat Hall

[Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18](#); [1 Corinthians 3:16-23](#); [Matthew 5:38-48](#)

Homilies are vehicles for breaking open the Word of God. First read the Sunday readings at <http://www.usccb.org/nab/022011.shtml>

Offer no resistance... When someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one as well...

That's a pretty tough one for a hockey fan.

When my wife found out I was up-to-bat this weekend she asked me what the homily would be about. I told her it was about "turning the other cheek". She gave me a wink and wished me good luck.

During 27 years in law enforcement, I've been struck a number of times on my cheek... and other places. On those occasions I was called to put my training into action. All of my actions were governed by the standard of the minimum necessary justified force. But I'm not hearing Jesus say "respond with the *minimum necessary justified force*." He says, "Offer no resistance." I want to say, "Yes, Jesus, *but* in real life there is evil that threatens our very safety." And yet I think Jesus knows something first hand about real evil that threatens our very safety. I ask, "*But*, Jesus, what about self defense? Even our catechism speaks about the right to defense."ⁱ

As a nation, we invest heavily into our self-defense. I grew up during the Cold War when stockpiles of nuclear weapons were amassed to assure the destruction of any enemy who would dare try to nuke us. In the interest of self-defense, we have perfected the means to end life on earth as we know it.

His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI wrote:

I encourage the initiatives that seek progressive disarmament and the creation of zones free of nuclear weapons, with a view to their complete elimination from the planet. I exhort to overcome the burdens of history and to weave patiently a political and economic web of peace in order to foster integral human development and the authentic aspirations of peoples".ⁱⁱ

Our President Obama proclaimed:

I state clearly and with conviction America's commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons. I'm not naive. This goal will not be reached quickly -- perhaps not in my lifetime. It will take patience and persistence.ⁱⁱⁱ

It is clear to these religious and political leaders that the law of *eye for an eye* will lead us ultimately to mutual destruction. They also counsel having patience as this will take the work of generations.

You may have noticed that I have shifted the focus off of me and on to the failings of our national defense strategy. I can sign petitions and call Congressman Upton, to support efforts against the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Then I could go to sleep knowing I've done my part.

But then I'd have to wake up and face a new day, a day where **I** am to "offer no resistance...to turn the other cheek".

The key is grace-filled patience. It will take time to dismantle my retaliatory nature. It is retaliation that feeds the cycle of violence. We are not called to be passive in the face of violence. We are called to be creative and courageous.^{iv}

The slap on the right cheek is meant for humiliation, for dominance. The way someone is struck on the right cheek is either with the other's right backhand or a slap with their left hand. In either case, a backhand does not do so much violence as domination. In Jesus' time, the left hand was used for personal hygiene and the right hand for public interaction. It was disgusting to even place one's left hand on the table. To strike with one's left hand was to insult beyond the physical sting.^v

If one were to follow the law of *eye for an eye*, the victim would lay in wait for revenge thus perpetuating the cycle of violence.

When one stands firm to turn the other cheek, it is a bold statement that he or she refuses to be shamed into submission.

Additionally, Jesus asks us to love the enemy who afflicts. God loves all regardless of their righteousness. This is demonstrated in the rain and sun he provides to all. This is Jesus' new commandment for universal love. Until then, that loyalty was fit only for family, tribe or nation. One can see that it would be easier to obliterate an enemy when we characterize them as "the other", as Godless. Look how we've justified our actions against non-Christian people from colonial times to the Cold War. We still see strands of that today as we confront militant Islam.

I am asked to be perfect as God is perfect. I look to see if my reactions are retaliatory or courage seeking grace. I am asked to see the enemy

as a child of God, to love universally as God does.

Nuclear disarmament may take generations. My personal transformation will take time.

I probably should first start practicing with my spouse. With you folks, I try to put up a façade. If, I am irritated, I will still try to smile. My wife isn't so lucky. If I am annoyed when she is around, I display no pleasant face. She sees the ugly stuff raw. I am likely to retaliate with a cutting remark often along the lines where I am right and she is wrong. Any of you married men out there who might practice this I ask, "How is that working out for you?"

As I contemplate how to change, I am brought back again to my "But, Jesus..." reactions. I mean, to maintain a respectable façade for you folks takes work. Is there no place I can let down my guard and just be me?

Jesus replies, "Yes, Pat, let down your guard and be... just like me, just like my father."

"But, that is beyond human."

Jesus replies, "I'd be worried if you were merely human, but you are a son of God. Let me into your heart and allow my father's grace to shine on you, to saturate you with his love."

I ask you now, as Jesus is asking all of us, to practice turning the other cheek. I'd like to give you a ½ minute to reflect on a time or situation where you responded with retaliation. Think about an encounter with another human being where you thought of them as "the other" and not as your brother or sister. Could you have done something different? Could you have invited the Holy Spirit to inspire you, to empower you to respond with God's grace? Afterwards, come to this table to receive the very presence of Jesus in preparation of how you hope to respond to tomorrow's offense.

Get comfortable. Breathe easy. When have you retaliated? Who did you treat as less than a child of God?

(30 seconds of silence)

X In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

ⁱ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 2265

ⁱⁱ Pope Benedict XVI, Message for the 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference

ⁱⁱⁱ President Barak Obama, Prague 2009

^{iv} John Shea, *On Earth as it is in Heaven*, p 84

^v John J. Pitch, *The Cultural World of Jesus, Cycle A*, p 37