

A few weeks ago, while Father Tom was vacationing down in sunny Florida, Monica and I were also down that way enjoying a cruise. Now we've cruised a few times in the past but never on one of those giant megaships. These things are huge, they carry over 8500 people. They're more like a floating city than a ship. It was a new experience and we were pleasantly surprised about some things and disappointed in others. But there was one thing that we observed that was totally unexpected; and that was the passengers. Evidently, being on one of the biggest ships in the world draws different clientele. Of the more than 6000 passengers, I'm thinking maybe a third of them was what I'm used to seeing: mainly folks from Canada and the Northern US trying to get away from the cold for a week as well as others from around the world checking out the Caribbean. Close to another third on this ship were, well, they were urban and black. Now I'm not sure what drew them, and I'm not trying to make anything about this, it's just that I've never witnessed that on a cruise before. But the real surprise was who the remaining third was; they were Amish! I'm not sure why they were there exactly, maybe a conference. And I was kind of surprised they c/would be there at all. But having these two groups together did make for the quite the spectacle. The Amish women were all wearing these long summer weight linen dresses and had their hair up in a bonnet. And the urban folks were dressed, let's just say a lot differently. In fact, one of the black

entertainers on the ship said that sitting up on the deck and watching the crowd go by was like a parade of bonnets and ... Well, you can use your imagination on the word and the visual.

What fascinated me even more about having these two radically different groups on board was noticing that they couldn't or wouldn't interact. I think the Amish couldn't think of what to make of the urban black culture: their clothing, language, or choice of music. And the urban folk, I found out later, thought the Amish were racist. I guess I really haven't seen too many black Amish, come to think of it.

Throughout human history it's probably the norm for different groups of people and cultures not to trust one another. And when there was interaction and it went bad, there was often swift and brutal retribution. To help His chosen people begin to move past that, God, through Moses, gave the world His commandments. Now it wasn't just the ten commandments, as anyone who has read Leviticus would know, but most people at least accept the ten.

We've all heard of the golden rule of course. But if you concentrate solely on the 10 commandments, especially the last 7, you sort of end up with a "Silver" rule: "Don't do to others what you wouldn't want done to you." This works I guess, but

it's more like a "trust but verify" arrangement, and you can still get pretty brutal in the implementation of justice for those who break the rules.

But the "silver" rule was not where God was taking the Jewish people. If you look at the Jewish Testament as a whole, you can see we were led to the "golden" rule: "Do unto others as you would want others to do to you." Or as we saw in our first reading, "love your neighbor as yourself." Now that works out pretty well, providing you are in the right crowd to be considered a neighbor. However, you don't necessarily have to be sincere about it at all. It could end up very business-like and then it all deteriorates into "You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours." Kind of a quid pro quo scenario.

But Jesus Christ asks us to go further, doesn't He? We can't just love our short list of neighbors and then only if there's something in it for us. That's a bit insincere. No, we are to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. Kind of hard to do without being sincere. Why take us there? Because that's where you end up if you look at others with the eyes of God, who wants all people to know and experience His love. The willingness to sacrifice, even endure mistreatment, is indeed to act with "selflessness," which is exactly what our Lord did for us. It's all part of the journey of holiness, to become more like our maker,

Jesus Christ, the one who saves us from ourselves and our tendency for “selfishness.”

We all know this. But do we, or can we, *really* practice this in our lives? Do we interact with “enemies” these days? I’m afraid that politics enflamed by media have gotten us there. Here’s a challenge. How about trying to love someone who completely disagrees with us politically? Who votes or campaigns for that candidate we despise? Perhaps that’s the one benefit of our divided culture, we have opportunities to practice our faith. Maybe it could be a Lenten discipline we work towards this year. Maybe Father Tom should consider that as penance for our next reconciliation. Wouldn’t that be a surprise. You never know.

The folks from the two diverse groups I observed on the cruise ship could not get to this level, even though both sides may have considered themselves Christian. It’s not easy. You can’t just go through the motions either. Oh, you can practice the silver rule, or even the golden rule without sincerity, but the law of Christ requires a change of heart. And that’s a good place, perhaps, to start when Lent begins next week.

To be a follower of Christ, we have to be like Christ. And that means we must first see the other as He does. May He continue to open our eyes, hearts, and minds a little more every day.