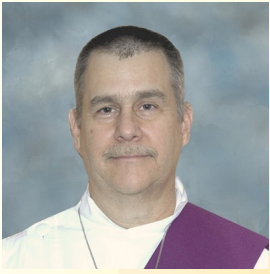


## Homily Rerun: February 19, 2017 - Deacon Bruce



Jesus commands us to love everyone, including those who wrong us. Moreover, he calls us to love others, just as God loves us. Jesus is inviting us, actually ordering us, to imitate God Himself, and in the words of the Evangelist Matthew: to **“be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.”** Jesus urges us, pushes us, to go beyond the traditional, ritualistic, and legalistic righteousness, and wants us to think, say, and do things with a pure heart.

The word “perfect” comes from a Greek work “teleios” “Teleios” is mentioned many times in the New Testament, and is almost always translated as “perfect, mature, complete, and full grown.” Jesus neither expects sinless perfection nor demands moral equality with God of us. He does expect us to grow in the faith, and spiritually mature in the faith.

Jesus seems to echo the words that are found in the First Reading from Leviticus, **“Be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy.”** (Leviticus 19:2) Perfection can be understood as holiness.

The Second Vatican Council spoke about “the universal call to holiness.” Holiness is a task and a gift extended not just to some special people in the church, but to all followers of Jesus.

In the Old Testament, God is “holy.” He is “separated” from everything and everyone else. So God’s people should also be holy: they should be “separated” from the other people, separated from everything worldly, separated from sin. In the Old Testament they do this by their new behavior, by obeying the laws of the Holy One.

In the New Testament, God is Love. **“In this way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him.”** (1 John 4:9) Ephesians Chapter 5 commands, **“So be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and handed himself over for us as a sacrificial offering to God.”** (Ephesians 5:1-2) **“Be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ.”** (Ephesians 4:32)

I think some of the most difficult of all of Christ’s commands are those which are found in today’s Gospel. **“You have heard it said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one as well.”** **“You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”**

There is something within me that believes that real justice is in the law “an eye for an eye.” In reality, I think there are a lot of us who tend to believe that we would rather live in an Old Testament world, than live in a world where we are expected to sacrifice our desire for vengeance to the Lord’s command to love our enemies. Jesus, through his teaching on forgiveness, is challenging us further to go against our nature by going beyond the law of love and revenge. He teaches that in addition to loving our neighbors, we are to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. As followers of Christ, we must never seek revenge. Jesus asks us to give a dramatic testimony by offering no resistance to the evil person. This, however, does not mean becoming a doormat. When a man strikes Jesus, He does not strike back, but He says, “Why did you strike me?” Jesus challenges His attacker because He wants that man’s conversion.

St. Mother Teresa wrote, in her Address to the United Nations on October 26, 1985: “How does peace come? Through works of love. Where does it begin? At home. How does it begin? By praying together. For family that prays together stays together. And if you stay together, you will love one another as God loves each one of you....And so there you and I must come forward, and share the joy of loving, but we cannot give what we don’t have. That’s why we need to pray. And prayer will give us a clean heart, and a clean heart will allow us to see God in each other. And if we see God in each other, we will be able to live in peace and if we live in peace, we will be able to share the joy of loving with each other and God will be with us.” (St. Mother Teresa’s Address to the United Nations October 26, 1985)

I leave you with another quote from the same address, “And so today, when we have gathered here together, let us carry in our hearts one strong resolution: I will love. I will be a carrier of God’s love. For that is what Jesus came to teach us: How to love one another. And to bring Him to love at home, in our own family... to those that are unwanted.”