

7<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Sunday  
February 23, 2020  
“An End to Hatred and Revenge”

Lev 19:1...18  
1 Cor 3:16-23  
Mt 5:38-48

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord –

One of the most difficult human responses to control is not to retaliate when someone deliberately does harm to us. When we are hurt, we want to strike back. When those we love have been hurt, we want to retaliate! However, then, more retaliation becomes the objective of the one who hurt us in the first place. At that point, things usually escalate beyond control.

This scenario is also the case between families, larger groups, and even nations. And the result is usually warfare of some kind – with great damage and harm to others who are innocent of any wrong-doing!

At the root of most deliberate harm to others is hatred – And hatred, by definition, seeks the destruction of the one who is hated. I mention all the foregoing because the scriptures for today have much to teach us about dealing with hatred and revenge.

In the Book of Leviticus, God commands us to be holy, for He, the Lord our God, is holy! We are made in God’s image – as is every other human being who has ever lived. We should and must reflect God’s goodness and His Glory. We cannot have hatred in our minds and hearts and be able to do this. Consequently, revenge is forbidden and so are the grudges that lead to hatred and revenge. In fact, whenever we get back at another with hatred in our heart, we become godless ourselves and no different than those who did evil to us!

4000 years ago the Chosen People were very limited in their moral development.

God had to bring them, gradually, to a higher sense of moral consciousness. Thus, they understood that God's command to love extended only to family, neighbors, and other members of the Hebrew nation. Enemies were outside this prohibition!

It's no wonder, then, that Jesus created such a stir with his contemporaries. In St. Matthew's Gospel, Jesus tells us that we must love our enemies and pray for those who do us harm. The Law of the Talion which permitted retaliation, but only equal in kind, was not permitted from a true disciple. A disciple must turn the other cheek – go the extra mile – give even more than what is demanded! Because only by this kind of loving response, to whatever others do to us, can they be changed – and the seed of love planted in their hearts!

The moral development of the human race has taken centuries to evolve to where it is today. However, it is still far from being universal. Some are still at stage #1, which endorses unlimited revenge. Some are at stage #2, which is the limited revenge of the Talion – “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”. Some are at stage #3, which is the Silver Rule of not doing to others what we do not want them to do to us. Some are at stage #4, which is the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” And, since the time of Jesus, some are at stage #5, which means loving even our enemies as the children of God which they truly are!

However, loving our enemies does not mean that we do not try to do what we can to change them, their thinking, and their behavior. If they are at a lower stage of moral development, then we might be forced to bring pressure on them at a level they can, at least, begin to understand. But we must never do so with hatred or the spirit of revenge!

Finally, Brothers and Sisters, St. Paul reminds us that we are all temples of God. Unfortunately, too many today don't know this – or if they do, they don't take it seriously. If we take it seriously, we will focus upon doing all that Jesus asks of us in his Gospel – and on what the Holy Spirit reveals to our hearts. This is how we can change – This is how we can help others change – And if enough others change – then will our world, itself, be changed!

So, let us pray, today, for God's grace and for God's wisdom –  
May we bring God's love and life into a world that has known hatred for far too long!

Amen.

February 23, 2020

Msgr. Russell G. Terra