

Homily - 7th Sunday OT YA

As we continue in our listening to the Sermon on the Mount, Our Lord lays out many basic life teachings...several of them are remarkably difficult to understand, much less to put into practice. This week is no different as we receive two of the more famous maxims from the Sermon: "turn the other cheek" and "love your enemy". To understand the depths of these teachings and how radical they are for his direct listeners and us today, we should analyze the context, the time and place, in which Our Lord is speaking. Our Lord presented His sermon in the hillside of Galilee, an area which was a hotbed of revolt. Revolutionaries and radicals sometimes went to this area to plot against Herod and the Romans, who were a hated occupying force. The people in the region probably thought they were going to get a fiery sermon from Our Lord...get the people ready for a fight... for liberation and freedom...something we would see in a Mel Gibson movie. Rather...they get a speech to the contrary, instead of fighting their oppressors, they are told to "turn the other cheek". Instead of harbouring rage and anger against their enemy, they are told to love them. The message that Our Lord delivers is the only thing they were to be radical in was love.

For the Jewish people who were listening to the Sermon, it was clear that their enemy were the Romans...Gentiles who have lived an immoral life far from God and have inflicted so much suffering on them. But, who is my enemy? Is it the guy who almost ran me over in his car...those who have different values or outlooks on life...or those who directly oppose the teachings of the Catholic Church? Going through this list, I thought of how difficult it is to live out Our Lord's radical teaching of love...how anyone other than Our Lord and Our Lady could possibly live out these challenging maxims. And then the example of St. Maria Goretti came to mind.

Maria Goretti, while mending the shirt of her brother, was attacked by Alessandro. When he tried to rape her, Maria resisted. Alessandro began to choke her and when Maria continued to resist, he stabbed her 14 times. When found, Maria was taken to the nearest hospital for surgery. While in the hospital, Maria forgave Alessandro and said she wanted to see him in Heaven with her. She died while looking upon an image of the Virgin Mary and holding a cross to her chest. Alessandro went to prison and remained unrepentant for his actions until he had a dream in which Maria was there. When he woke, he repented his crime and lived a reformed life. When he was released 27-years-later, he went directly to Maria's mother and begged her forgiveness, which she gave, saying, "If my daughter can forgive him, who am I to withhold forgiveness?" When Maria Goretti was canonized a saint on June 24th, 1950, Alessandro was present...for he is the first miracle of her example in loving her enemy. Rather than go to her death hating Alessandro for what he had done to her, her love was so great...so radical, that she was able to forgive him.

Like St Maria Goretti and the great cloud of witnesses in heaven, the saints, there is no limit to how much love we are to show to others. With Christ at the centre and meaning of human history, we look to Him and try to conform our lives to his example. Like St Maria Goretti did when she died forgiving her attacker, we look to Our Lady and hold on to the cross. It is on the cross that we find the radical love of Our saviour. There, he showed us how to turn the other cheek when he was struck by the

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temple guards and the Roman soldiers. There, he showed us how to give our garment as he was stripped of his. There he took the weight of the cross not just one mile but up the hill to Golgotha. From the cross, he begged His Father for forgiveness for those who were persecuting him. There on the cross he showed us the depth of the Father's love...a radical love that is unconditional and shows no distinction. It is at the cross where we meet Our Lady, who is to be our mother and we take her into our home and look to her to teach us how to love in the worst situations we are faced with.

In following the example of Christ, the only thing that we Christians as temples are of the Holy Spirit are allowed to be radical about is love. This is one of Our Lord's most difficult teachings...but they are not impossible to follow. We see in the lives of the saints that when the bar is set high, Our Lord provides us with the help to reach and even exceed the bar. During this week, you have the opportunity to reflect on who is your enemy...who are the people that when they come to mind gets you inflamed with rage and anger. And then, in prayer, bring those people...bring those relationships before the Lord remembering the words of St Francis of Assisi: where there is hatred, let me bring your love.