

## St Pius & St Anthony Homily 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time Year C (2024)

We just had a good February snow. There was some good sledding that went on down the hill right next to us on the Calvert Elementary side of church. Thinking of snow sports, I must say it up front, "I am not a snow skier"! I can manage two skis in the water, but I have no skill at all with snow skiing. So, how did it happen that I ended up on a snow ski trip to Paoli Peaks in Indiana for midnight sessions-All Night skiing with a youth group out of Bowling Green KY back in the mid 1990's. I'll leave out all the drama and just summarize my time on the slopes. I only mastered the bunny slope. Never having been skiing before, first I went chillingly underdressed for being outside all night (they used snowmaker machines and so my not having any headwear made my hair get iced over with 'frosted tips' before that was a thing in fashion). My night began sitting around the fire in the lodge with the other adults, until I realized that I am not sure this qualifies as 'chaperoning'- I have no eyes on the students. So, I went through equipment rental room and got boots and skis and went out on to the slopes. I located some of our kids, that were going through an orientation set of lessons and then I was let loose on the bunny slope. After a couple of trips down it, I went along with them to the next level of risk--the intermediate slope. I wasn't thrilled about getting on the ski-lift riding to the top, so I simply walked sideways like a crab up the hill about 50 feet and turned to ski down just that bit of it (it was much steeper than bunny version), and going down I realized how much speed you can pick up, so I just prudently, fell over, to get stopped safely! It occurred to me that it just wouldn't be responsible for a chaperone to his leg on a ski trip. So, I stood for a while at the bottom of the slope to congratulate the youth and comment on their style as they came sliding in (like a cheer section for them).

The lesson in all of this: you have to try. I wasn't be ready, but I tried. And I'll make a go at it, again, sometime. Three slopes, the bunny, the intermediate and the advanced-expert, but I'd never make it to top slope if I didn't try. Success that night for me was riding back on the bus next morning with no injuries (myself or anyone else). But I'd be up for another day. It takes practice &time keeping at it.

I think the same idea applies to the steep challenge we hear from Jesus about being so forgiving, loving and generous, And isn't it a challenge?

"Love enemies, do good to haters, pray for bullies mistreating you." This teaching highlights how **different and above**, Jesus is from the world! Talk about stand-out! But is it possible? Yes. (*"All things are possible with Him"* Matt 19:26) So, before we rule it out as out of reach for us (*'to love an enemy'!!*) I want to emphasize that Jesus **knows** (how high he is setting the bar) what he is asking of us. Like any good coach, he is going to push his players for more from them, and like a good physical therapist, he is going to ask for five more steps up (when you

almost feel like collapsing). Again, Jesus **knows** that He is asking for an ‘A-Team’ top response from His followers, and here is why: notice how He began: “To you who hear, I say” Luke 6:27 – that is like saying, “To you who are still listening...” It may not be at first, for everyone to accomplish this – it may be the advanced slope for those ready for the next level, eager for serious challenges to grow into the kingdom! He pulled a similar move last Sunday’s gospel when he introduced the beatitudes in Lk 6:20, which tells that Jesus “**raising his eyes toward his disciples**, said, “Blessed...”—notice there He **was looking up to them**, asking more from them)

But Jesus introduces this greater challenge in stages: It all begins with better thoughts for them **and prayer!** Notice that all his initial commands involve praying, blessing and sending goodwishes toward them – all at level of heart/mind “**love** enemies, **do good** to those hating you, **bless** those cursing you, **pray** for mis-treaters” These transformative intentions in prayer, are aimed at overcoming them with goodness, converting their hearts to better conduct. He doesn’t want us to take up their toxic aggression, or resort to their offensive negativity. NO, He is after their conversion – get them to good. Go after them with love, pursue their conversion by grace, and teach them forgiving generosity.

Jesus asks for positive action from Christians, toward opponents – don’t let them keep hurting themselves with their bully tactics (yes he flips it on them—they are hurting themselves!). So, hold them in your heart-prayer, offer blessing prayer over them, pray for their being drawn to grace, to know God and find true benefit. Kill their cruelty with kindness. Then Jesus steps up to the level of action – physically interacting with them (*keep in mind this is next level action – it takes prayer preparation and strength training itself!-may not be for everybody in the beginning-so be careful-Jesus doesn’t want anyone endangered- so avoid what they call ‘doormat’ Christians-just passively accepting cruelty*). So Jesus gets to action level, 1) if struck, He says ‘turn your cheek and look at them again (**humanize** the interaction, face them--don’t wince and walk off) 2) If they take your cloak, see if they need your tunic too – he means that once both of their hands are filled, they can’t steal from anyone else! and 3) give freely to someone without strings or demands of payment back – the higher giving is meant to move/inspire their heart too.

I know it’s tempting to dismiss all of this, as ‘pie in the sky’ ‘fantasy farm’ or ‘never-never land’, but remember that Jesus knows it is a steep climb (recall that it is Calvary Hill that we are after!) What is Christianity without the cross of Jesus? Last week in the second reading, St Paul asked us to consider that ‘if Christ can’t rise from dead (convert enemies) than what are we doing?’ (1 Corinthians 15:17 & 19) I suggest that Jesus anticipates us to resist this love teaching (*‘this is crazy-who can do it?’*) and that is why He articulates for us next a couple of motivational reasons to love this Way of His! He wants to reverse the stream of violence history turn back its course. So, He throws in the golden rule: Do unto others as we would want

done to us. Set the tone! He wants us to imagine: Have we ever done wrong? How did we want it pointed out to us - to be attacked or to be taught right. And what if that offender, there really is something wrong with them. They are sick, their pushy demands stem from their vulnerability, their weakness, their problem. If I was sick/hurting, how would I want to be treated – helped with understanding (treat me firmly, but considerately). Jesus is saying, “that enemy of good-yes, they are not right- take pity on them! The Christian should be stronger! Then Jesus adds another motivating consideration: If I am only going to love those who love me, give to those who fully give back, or be good to those being good already to me, than what does the world gain from that? Nothing is added here. It is selfish, if I only loved because I expect it back! What is that- that is a child! I need to grow to be bigger, invest more, risk a little, and add the extra that this world so desperately needs. Obviously, it isn't there already, so I need to put it in, sacrifice a little more and give to offset or change the polarity from bad to good.

Jesus asks His Christians to be different! How is the kingdom to come, on earth as it is in heaven (as we pray all time) if we don't ever push ourselves to be more Christlike and take it the next level? So, Jesus wants us to be children of our merciful Father (merciful like Him-to look like Him live like Him), who loves both the deserving and undeserving, loving both the friend and enemy. That love converts. Its not easy to hear, and even more difficult to practice, but if we never try the next level, then where is Christ in that, where is Christ in us, then?