

BREAKING OPEN THE WORD



February 23, 2014

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 79

Gospel [mt 5:38-48](#)

Jesus said to his disciples: "You have heard that it was 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. If anyone wants to go to law with you over your tunic, hand over your cloak as well. Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go for two miles. Give to the one who asks of you, and do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow. "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, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same? So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Spiritual Reflection:

The real challenge of Jesus' teachings on loving one's enemies is not "loving" some group designated by a label based on politics, sociology or economics or "loving" some remote "sinner" we will never have anything to do with; the challenge of today's Gospel is to love the people we live with and work with and go to school with, the people we struggle with, the people who annoy us (and whom we annoy). "To love our enemies" is not just to declare a cease-fire but to create and maintain an atmosphere where reconciliation is always possible and actively sought. The Jesus of the Gospel instills within us a vision that sees beyond stereotypes, politics and appearances and recognizes and honors the goodness possessed by every human being. In the Greek text of Matthew's Gospel, the word used in today's text for love is *agape*. The word indicates not a romantic or emotional kind of love we have for the special ones in our lives but, rather, a state of benevolence and good will. The *agape* that Jesus asks us to have for our "enemies" means that no matter how he/she hurts us, we will never let bitterness close our hearts to that person nor will we seek anything but good for that "enemy." *Agape* is to recognize the humanity we share with all people who call God "Father" - and it begins within our own households and communities.

Spiritual Questions:

1. Why not an eye for eye?
2. Who do you find it toughest to love?
3. Why is love of enemy important to Jesus?
4. How can you develop agape love?
5. Who are the people in your life who you struggle with?