

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

1 John 2:5

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Whoever keeps the word of Christ,
the love of God is truly perfected in him.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Matt 5:38-48; L79A**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.”****Reflecting on the Gospel**

He would give someone the shirt off his back. She would go the extra mile for anyone. They are off-the-wall generous. We often hear stories of people who give of themselves way beyond expectation, who help another at personal expense, who spend holidays feeding the hungry. We have so many ways of saying and doing this gospel. Although we all know people who are takers rather than givers, who are stingy and selfish, who are minimalists when it comes to relating to others, our first impulse is to believe in the goodness and generosity of people.

Although we don't always do what Jesus says in this gospel—turn from retaliation, give more than is asked, love beyond what is easy—we do have a sense that what Jesus is asking of us is how we would want the community in which we live to be characterized.

In our treatment of one another—even those who are our enemies—Jesus (as Moses in the first reading) challenges us to go beyond what is expected, beyond what we might think is reasonable or even achievable. We are to go beyond what is human to what is divine: “Be holy” as God is holy (first reading), “be perfect” as God is perfect (gospel). On our own, this is impossible! Only because of God's love for us expressed in the life of Jesus who teaches us rightly, is this possible. Only when we experience God's love for us first, is this possible.

Jesus commands us to keep the law in a radically different way. We are duty-bound as “children of [the] heavenly Father” to do more than simply what is mandated. We are to go beyond our natural expectation about keeping laws to embrace the divine excess with which God treats us. Acting toward others as God acts toward us transforms us to “be perfect” as God. This radical living of the law makes divine blessings, grace, and holiness to be real, visible, and at hand for us.

Living the Paschal Mystery

Acting toward others as God acts toward us takes quite a bit of readjusting in our thinking and doing. We must squelch our first impulses to strike out with hand and word. Rather than negatively judging another who doesn't do as we think he or she should, we must look beyond our narrow perception of things and give the other the benefit of the doubt. However, just as with the early disciples, this readjustment does not happen overnight, nor does it happen automatically.

“Well, that will have to do for now.” How often in daily tasks isn't this our cry? We have only a little bit of time to clean the house, so what we do will just have to do. We must write a sympathy card and can't seem to find the right words for a young widow with children, and so we do our best and say that will just have to do. A “that will just have to do” attitude is hardly the way of living to which this gospel challenges us! On the other hand, the gospel examples seem way out of proportion to our ordinary responses, and to the ordinary demands daily living places upon us. Jesus is not asking us, however, to go looking for folks without coats (although there are plenty in our neighborhoods and cities), or for those who need us to go the extra mile for them (there are plenty who need such help), or to give our money away willy-nilly. What Jesus is asking us to do is look upon every other person, whether friend or foe, family member or stranger, as the beloved of God. Acting in this manner is being holy and perfect as God, and is done not in dramatic ways but in simple everyday gestures of love, respect, and care for others.

Focusing the Gospel

Key words and phrases: You have heard, But I say, children of your heavenly Father, be perfect . . . as your heavenly Father

To the point: Jesus commands us to keep the law in a radically different way. We are duty-bound as “children of [the] heavenly Father” to do more than simply what is mandated. We are to go beyond our natural expectation about keeping laws to embrace the divine excess with which God treats us. Acting toward others as God acts toward us transforms us to “be perfect” as God. This radical living of the law makes divine blessings, grace, and holiness to be real, visible, and at hand for us.

Connecting the Gospel

to the first reading: God commands Israel to be holy as God is holy. Jesus commands disciples to be perfect as God is perfect. We are holy and perfect when we learn from the Son how to be daughters and sons of the same Father.

to experience: Both perfection and holiness are beyond human effort. We will always fall short of expectations and demands. Yet Jesus commands us to be perfect! How so? How possible? Only in him. By God’s grace.

Connecting the Responsorial Psalm

to the readings: We begin this responsorial psalm commanding our whole being to bless the God who pardons our sins, heals our ills, and redeems us from destruction. Rather than the justice our human hearts so readily understand and measure out, our God offers us mercy far beyond the horizon of our comprehension (“As far as the east is from the west”). Such attitudes and actions describe the holiness of God. This divine holiness is not an attribute but a state of being: God *is* holy. And we are to be holy as God is (first reading), perfect as God is (gospel). Jesus spells out the details. We are to relate to one another as God relates to us, going beyond the expected, loving without reserve, forgiving even what is unforgivable. Can we do this? Yes, because the God who is kind and merciful will nudge us with parental compassion (psalm) until we reach full stature as children of the Holy One.

to psalmist preparation: In singing this responsorial psalm you tell the assembly about the holiness of God, who is compassionate, merciful, and forgiving. This is the holiness to which they are called (see first reading and gospel). Where do you see this holiness in them? in yourself?

ASSEMBLY & FAITH-SHARING GROUPS

- Realizing I am a child of the “heavenly Father” draws me to . . . demands of me . . .
- While striving to be perfect as the “heavenly Father,” I need . . .
- I struggle with the thought that I am holy because . . . with the thought that I am perfect as God in heaven because . . .

PRESIDERS

My presiding helps members of the assembly be transformed to “be perfect” as God is perfect when I . . .

DEACONS

My service takes me beyond what is expected when . . . beyond what is reasonable when . . . to holiness when . . .

HOSPITALITY MINISTERS

My greeting of the gathering assembly calls them to holiness when I . . .

MUSIC MINISTERS

My music ministry requires I do more than . . .

ALTAR MINISTERS

The very demands of this ministry can bring me to the holiness and perfection of God because . . .

LECTORS

When I go beyond what is expected of me in engaging with and living God’s word, my proclamation becomes . . .

EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION

Distributing Holy Communion becomes my participation in God’s divine excess when I . . .