

## SPIRITUALITY

## GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

John 13:34

R/. Alleluia, alleluia.

I gave you a new commandment, says the Lord:  
love one another as I have loved you.

R/. Alleluia, alleluia.

**Gospel** Luke 6:27-38; L81C

Jesus said to his disciples:

"To you who hear I say,  
love your enemies, do good to those who  
hate you,  
bless those who curse you, pray for those  
who mistreat you.

To the person who strikes you on one cheek,  
offer the other one as well,  
and from the person who takes your cloak,  
do not withhold even your tunic.

Give to everyone who asks of you,  
and from the one who takes what is yours  
do not demand it back.

Do to others as you would have them do to  
you.

For if you love those who love you,  
what credit is that to you?

Even sinners love those who love them.

And if you do good to those who do good to  
you,

what credit is that to you?

Even sinners do the same.

If you lend money to those from whom you  
expect repayment,

what credit is that to you?

Even sinners lend to sinners,

and get back the same amount.

But rather, love your enemies and do good  
to them,

and lend expecting nothing back;

then your reward will be great

and you will be children of the Most High,

for he himself is kind to the ungrateful  
and the wicked.

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

"Stop judging and you will not be judged.

Stop condemning and you will not be  
condemned.

Forgive and you will be forgiven.

Give, and gifts will be given to you;

a good measure, packed together, shaken  
down, and overflowing,

will be poured into your lap.

For the measure with which you measure  
will in return be measured out to you."

**Reflecting on the Gospel**

A classic device when children are called upon to share something is to have one divide it and the other choose which half is hers. This can happen with a piece of cake, cookie, pizza, or other food. But it can also happen with other items as well. Rarely does one child say to the other, "You can have it all." The purpose of the device is to share something in an equitable manner. And perhaps this works for children. It sometimes works for adults too!

The advice Jesus gives in today's gospel couldn't be more different. He is calling us to a higher standard. It's as though we are asked to divvy up the treat

and instead we say, "You can have it all."

Even more, the way of sharing a cookie between children might assume they are friendly. But Jesus speaks here of "enemies." This is an entirely different category. Jesus assumes his ancient listeners have enemies, and that is something that transcends culture and time. Enemies are not limited to the ancient world!

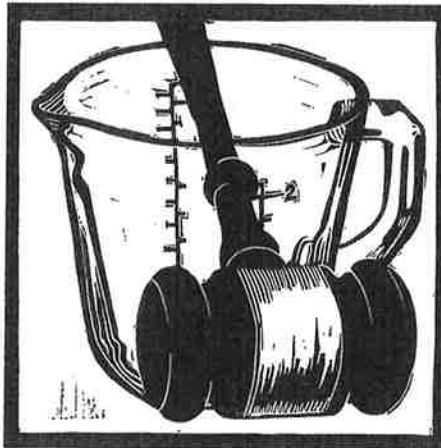
Christians are to love their enemies, blessing them and praying for them. The Christian standard is one higher than what we could expect from the world with its transactional view of relationships. As Jesus himself notes, it's fairly easy to love those who love us, and to

do good to those who do good to us. But it's another thing entirely to love those who are our enemies, to pray for them and to bless them.

We Christians are to be this way because God is this way. God is "kind to the ungrateful and the wicked." Should we be any different? We are to be merciful as the Father is merciful. And here we see in our own time the example of mercy given to us by Pope Francis. It is said that the word "mercy" is the hermeneutical key to his papacy. It is the way to understand and make sense of his actions. Pope Francis chose mercy because mercy is of God, and acting in this way demonstrates that we are followers of his son, Jesus.

**Living the Paschal Mystery**

When faced with the extraordinary demands of the gospel outlined in today's reading, one person said, "How can I do that? I'd end up with nothing?" Then we look to the example of Jesus who enfleshed the words he preached. Jesus himself loved his enemies and prayed for those who persecuted him. In the Gospel of Luke we will hear Jesus from the cross pray for their forgiveness. What did he end up with? Nothing; he died on a cross. But of course we know the rest of the story. God raised him from the dead. Only by Jesus giving himself completely and without reservation to the point of death is he ultimately raised up to glory with the Father. The words that form the conclusion of today's gospel are especially apropos. "Forgive and you will be forgiven. . . . For the measure with which you measure / will in return be measured out to you." We forgive others not so much for their sake but for our own.



**Focusing the Gospel**

**Key words and phrases:** [L]ove your enemies

**To the point:** In today’s gospel Jesus tells us twice, “[L]ove your enemies.” This statement is nestled into a longer list of moral injunctions. We could say, however, that this phrase, “love your enemies,” encompasses all the others and also points the way to emulating God’s love. God does not love only those who are worthy or good. God loves everyone simply because of their very existence. And so are we called to love as well. Our enemies could be one specific person with whom we have a feud, or it could be a group of people that we see (even if it is subconsciously) as “other” than ourselves and therefore not worthy of our concern. No matter how we might encounter “enemies” Jesus’ command remains the same, love them with the mercy, forgiveness, and compassion of God.

**Connecting the Gospel**

**to the first reading:** In the first reading from First Samuel we have an example par excellence of one man loving his enemy. David is pursued by King Saul. In his jealousy, Saul fears that David wants the throne for himself. Bent on killing David, Saul takes three thousand of his best warriors into the wilderness area where he hears David is hiding. Through the work of the Lord it is David, not Saul, who comes upon his enemy unawares. David finds Saul asleep with a spear stuck into the ground at his head, while all of his warriors slumber around him. And yet, with a clear opportunity to end his life of hiding and running from Saul, he does the king no harm. Our reading ends with David (now safely separated from Saul by a hilltop) telling the king, “The LORD will reward each man for his justice and faithfulness.”

**to experience:** Is there a contentious relationship in your life where you can follow David’s example and refuse to pick up the spear?

**Connecting the Responsorial Psalm**

**to the readings:** In the gospel Jesus tells us to be “merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” And how would we define God’s mercy? Today’s psalm paints a picture for us. Our God is “slow to anger and abounding in kindness.” No wrongdoing can put us beyond the reach of God, who “pardons all your iniquities,” removing them “[a]s far as the east is from the west.” We cannot give to our brothers and sisters what we have not received ourselves. Let us immerse ourselves in the infinite mercy of our God—only then will we be able to offer it to others.

**to psalmist preparation:** It is only in acknowledging our sins that we experience the gracious mercy of God. As you prepare to proclaim this psalm, lauding God’s abundant mercy, call to mind a time when you experienced forgiveness—either from a person in your life, or from God. What did it feel like to know your sin had been wiped away and your wrongdoing was forgotten?

**PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING**

In the first reading, David refuses to do harm to his enemy when he comes upon Saul unprotected. Where in your own life are you being called to choose peace and mercy over bitterness and revenge?

In the second reading, St. Paul tells us that we will bear the image of the heavenly man, Jesus, just as we have born the image of the earthly man, Adam. How might we, as individuals and as a parish, conform ourselves more perfectly to the image of Christ, the one who loves without counting the cost?

How does your family and/or parish follow Jesus’ command to “bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you”?

In the gospel we are told, “Give, and gifts will be given to you.” When have you experienced in your own life generosity begetting abundance?