

# Sunday, February 19, 2017

## 7th Sunday in Ordinary Time

### Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

#### Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18

2nd Reading:

1 Corinthians 3:16-23

Responsorial: Psalm 103:1-4, 8, 10, 12-13-34

Gospel:

Matthew 5:38-48

### Godly Perfection, *Loving and Forgiving our Enemies*

*Love your enemies.* (Matthew 5:44)

Can you picture getting to heaven, and the first person you meet is the one you liked least on earth? It's possible. After all, God loves that person just as much as he loves you. We should never presume to know how he judges each person.

No one falls outside the scope of God's loving intentions, either. What God wants for you here on earth is what he also wants for your aggravating neighbor. It's also what he wants for history's worst tyrants—that they “be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48).

Here's another surprise: your enemy can help you move closer toward that goal of perfection. Notice that Jesus' command to be perfect appears right after he explains how to treat the people who hate us: “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44). So if you want to be perfect, you begin by loving your enemies.

Are you thinking, “This is too much”? Of course it is! It's beyond human powers—or it would be, if Jesus hadn't suffered and died for us.

Try to cooperate with the Lord today. Think about the people you should be loving more than you do—and not just your “enemies.” Think too about the people you take for granted, look down on, or consider undeserving. Instead of harboring spiteful or judgmental thoughts, say a short prayer for someone who provokes you.

What if you have stronger emotions? When you find yourself dwelling on people who have hurt you or people you don't like or people with whom you have strong disagreements, stop yourself, and start praying for them.

Start with the people you live and work with. Pay attention to the thoughts that cross your mind, especially angry or hateful ones. Don't harbor them! Instead, take advantage of every invitation to love. Then the perfection of God will begin to shine out from you.

*“Father, help me to love, not hate. Help me to take another step toward the perfection you want for me*

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**Questions for Reflection/Discussion:**

1. In the first reading from Leviticus 19, the Lord commands us to: “Be holy, for I, the LORD your God, am holy.” He then provides some commands on how to be holy including: “You shall not bear hatred for your brother or sister in your heart. Though you may have to reprove your fellow citizen, do not incur sin because of him. Take no revenge and cherish no grudge against any of your people. You shall love your enemy as yourself.”
  - How are you doing in living up to these commands?
  - What steps can you take to do better?
2. In the responsorial psalm, we hear these words regarding the Lord's forgiveness and mercy: “He pardons all your iniquities, heals all your ills” and “He redeems your life from destruction, crowns you with kindness and compassion.”
  - In what ways have you experienced these words from the psalm, that is, the Lord's forgiveness and mercy?
3. The second reading opens with this question by St. Paul: “Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?”
  - How would you answer this question?
  - What role does the Holy Spirit, the love of God poured into our hearts (Romans 5:5), play in how you love and forgive others?
4. St. Paul goes on to challenge us with these words: “If any one among you considers himself wise in this age, let him become a fool, so as to become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in the eyes of God.”
  - What message is St. Paul trying to convey with these words?
5. In the Gospel reading, Jesus elevates two Jewish laws to much higher standards: “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” and “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” In doing so, he presents us with some daunting commands, including: “When someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one as well” and “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”
  - In what way is it necessary to personally know and experience the Lord's love and forgiveness, in order to love, forgive, and pray for those who have wronged you?
  - Has your personal knowledge and experience of the Lord's love and forgiveness impacted your own ability to forgive others as the Lord has forgiven you?
6. In the meditation on the Gospel reading, we hear these words: “Try to cooperate with the Lord today. Think about the people you should be loving more than you do—and not just your ‘enemies.’ Think too about the people you take for granted, look down on, or consider undeserving. Instead of harboring spiteful or judgmental thoughts, say a short prayer for someone who provokes you.” The meditation ends with these words: “Then the perfection of God will begin to shine out from you.”
  - In the Gospel reading, Jesus' command to be perfect appears right after he explains how to treat others. Why do you think how we treat and forgive others, not just our enemies, can help us move toward that daunting goal of perfection?
7. Take some time now to pray that you would experience more deeply your heavenly Father's transforming love and to pray for the grace to love and forgive others. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

***“Father, help me to love, not hate. Help me to take another step toward the perfection you want for me.”***

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, who is in partner relations for **The Word Among Us Partners**, (<http://www.waupartners.org/>); a ministry of **The Word Among Us** ([www.wau.org](http://www.wau.org)) to the military, prisoners, women with crisis pregnancies or who have had abortions, and college students. He is also a member of the **National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal** (<http://www.nsc-chariscenter.org/>) and a member of the board of

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