

Love Thine Enemy

1 Sam. 26: 2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-25; Ps. 103; 1 Cor. 15: 45-49; Lk. 6: 27-38

Christ never said that being one of His disciples would be easy. But, in the Gospel for this Sunday, He sets almost impossible standards for those who would call themselves Christians.

Jesus taught that love is the greatest commandment; the love of God and the love of neighbour. However, this time, He tells us not only to love our family and friends but also our enemies! He tells us to love those who hate us, to bless those who curse us, and to pray for those who abuse us. If someone takes something from us, we should offer them more.

This teaching runs counter to everything we have been taught from a young age. If someone steals something from us, we must be prepared to fight them to get it back. If someone ridicules us in public, we must be quick to set the record straight and put him in his place. We must show that we are strong and will not bow to anyone.

But if we ponder Jesus' teaching for a while, we realize that real strength is shown by the person who does not lash out at their persecutor. We saw large-scale examples of this 'passive resistance' organized by Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King. Both men led great numbers of people to work peacefully for change in their living conditions even though they were met with violence from people who wanted to maintain the status quo. In the end, they brought about significant changes when people respected the strength of their nonviolent commitment to their cause.

When King David was leading his army against the army of Saul, the armies were camped for the night and David sneaked into Saul's camp. David showed his strength and his love when he decided to forgo the opportunity to kill his enemy when he was sleeping. Instead, David told Saul what he had done; thereby earning Saul's respect. Because of this, the upcoming battle was averted and many lives were spared.

Loving an enemy takes great strength. It is easy to give in to feelings of rage and to take any opportunity to retaliate in a violent way toward someone who has stolen from you or persecuted you. But King David, Mahatma Gandhi, and Dr. Martin Luther King showed that much more can be gained by resisting the urge to violence and following Jesus' teaching to love our enemies.

Following Jesus' teaching can seem impossible. But we know that 'nothing is impossible for God'. When faced with the choice between loving our enemies and lashing out at them, we need to pray for God's grace to show the real strength that comes with love. Even though we are human with all the associated frailties, we know that we have been created 'in the likeness and image of God'. We also take comfort in the knowledge that the Holy Spirit dwells within us to strengthen us.

St. Paul tells us: *'Just as we have borne the image of the one of dust, we will also bear the image of the one of heaven.'* Although we bear the image of Adam, complete with his defects, let us pray that, by the grace of God, we may bear the image of Jesus Christ also by carrying out His teaching to love our enemies.