

Homily: 7th Sunday: Cycle C: 2022: 1 Sm 2: 7-9, 12-13, 22-23; Ps 103; 1 Corth 15: 45-49; Lk 6: 27-38

“Forgiveness of and love for our neighbor in God”

1. Today we hear **the call** of the Lord in the Gospel, and the example of David in the first reading, *to love our enemies, to do good to those who hate us, to bless those who curse us, and to pray for those who mistreat us. Why are we called to such a high standard by Jesus in relation to loving our neighbor, especially for those people who are not easy to love?* Because He wants us to be “*holy as His Heavenly Father is holy, who is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked*”, as Jesus says today in the Gospel. The Lord wants what is best for us, not what is mediocre, or the lowest common denominator in our fallen nature. Wow, how much the Lord really loves us; he doesn’t want our love to be average or strive for the bare minimum, but rather, heroic, in Him! **Loving our enemies, persecutors and those who don’t return our love, and people who irritate us to no end (*be they co-workers, neighbors, other parishioners or family members*) is a real test of our discipleship in Christ.** It’s easy to talk the talk; it’s hard to walk the walk! It’s a true test of whether we have been putting on Christ Jesus in our mind, heart and will as St. Paul urges us to do, in the power of the Holy Spirit. **The way of forgiveness and Christian charity is not easy, but it is spiritually liberating.** Forgiving others when they hurt us not only is a reflection of God’s holiness, but leads ultimately to healing of our souls, hearts and even our bodies. *We all should know from hard experience that when we hold a grudge or stay angry in our hearts towards others it manifests itself by taking away our inner peace, fraying our nerves, putting our stomach into knots and sometimes leads to outbursts of rage, cursing, and even ongoing sickness on a physical and mental level.* Not exactly a reflection of God’s holiness! We are called to a higher standard by Christ - if we want to be His disciples here on earth and one day be with Him in Heaven.
2. **Jesus points out today the important truth that to be holy, we must do more than simply love the people who love us, which is our natural inclination as**

human beings. That is not that difficult, at least most of the time. However **the test of our charity** is with people we don't naturally like or who have hurt us deeply (e.g., David in the first reading in relation to Saul). This is the challenge of living our Catholic Faith in concrete everyday action. **The call to holiness is NOT an abstraction, but is formed in every day challenges!** For instance, how do we love that ***co-worker*** who ignores us, or gossips about us behind our back, or maybe even stabs us in the back? Do we pray for them? Do we entrust them to God and give our feelings of resentment toward them over to God, or do we act upon these hurt feelings? How do we deal with ***the in-law*** who treats us with contempt and disdain for no apparent reason or who betrays our trust? How do we deal with that ***family member*** who rips on the Church and is SO negative about everything? What about our ***spouse*** who refuses to come to Mass and practice the Catholic faith in any real way, who is insensitive to us or who has hurt us in a serious way at some point in our marriage, or maybe still does? Do we offer the sacrifices and sufferings of our daily life for their ultimate conversion, as well as our own, in Christ? Or do we allow our heart to get cold and put up an emotional wall to "protect" ourselves from getting hurt again, all the while being really miserable inside, walking around with chains of sorrow and inner anger that eats away at us, and sometimes manifests itself in fits of rage? Jesus wants to set us free from that dreadful existence, which we can fall into if we are not living in His law of charity on a deep enough level.

3. **Jesus doesn't tell us to do something He Himself didn't first live out in His life here on earth.** His **ultimate act of forgiveness** of the cruelty and evilness of man was on the very Cross the human race murdered Him upon, when He said of His executioners, "***Father, forgive them they know not what they do.***" This is **the model** response for us humans of how we are to treat those who hurt, misunderstand, and even persecute and do evil toward us. We now have the grace in Christ to forgive and love just as He did. **To love, to do good, bless and pray for everyone,** but especially those most in need in prayers: those who regularly hurt and take advantage of others. We must be merciful as our Heavenly Father is

merciful, if we desire to receive His mercy and forgiveness for our manifold sins over the course of our lifetime, and especially at the hour of our death. As we pray untold times in the course of our lifetime in the ***Our Father***, “*And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.*” Do we believe and live that petition or are they just words we say over and over again, without thinking? *How can we not forgive others, when God has forgiven us numerous times in the Sacrament of Confession, of even grave sins?* **Please remember:** loving our neighbor doesn’t necessarily mean we have great feelings of attraction or pleasantness toward them - especially if they have hurt us badly and haven’t formally apologized and changed their insensitive/mean behavior toward us over time - but we do need to pray for both the healing of those hurts in our hearts and minds, and **to will in generosity** to pray for our persecutors spiritual well-being and not wish harm upon them: that God convert them and us in His holiness in a more profound way. Remember as Jesus says today at the end of the Gospel passage, “*For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you.*” Remember that always, for truly our eternal salvation is at stake! May God bless us all with a magnanimous and forgiving spirit. God bless you.