

SEXAGESIMA – 2022
1Sam 26:2;7-9;11-13;22-23
1Cor 15:45-49
Lk 6:27-38

President Woodrow Wilson said, “If you want to make enemies, try to change something.” In contrast, Oscar Wilde said, “Always forgive your enemies – nothing annoys them so much.” Two of today’s readings provide examples of both of these sayings while the third gives us the key to dealing with our enemies.

King Saul hated David and pursued him in order to kill him. Our first reading describes the occasion when Saul was at the mercy of David who had the opportunity to kill him with his own spear. Yet Saul was the Lord’s anointed and David refused to kill him, but David did make it clear to Saul that the opportunity had been there and he showed mercy. This reminds me of a comment from John F Kennedy who said, “Always forgive your enemies, but never forget their names.”

Jesus tried to change many things and so created enemies. He also forgave them which possibly annoyed them. In the Sermon on the Plain, Jesus was explaining the cost of Christian discipleship. Anyone who considers Jesus to be their Master must accept a way of life, a set of values and a quality of behaviour, that is different from what the secular world considers to be good and righteous. Jesus turns the world’s values upside down. After considering poverty, hunger, sadness and the persecuted, Jesus goes on to say in this sermon that we must not put ourselves first by demanding our rights. He tells us not to fight back because humility requires that we do not criticise the conduct of others and generosity demands that we don’t condemn others. We are to be magnanimous and not bear grudges and not to hold back in helping others in need.

Let’s be real, this is easy to say but very hard to do. St Paul explains to the Christians in Corinth that if we humans have an animal body we also have a spiritual body. In the story of creation Adam became a living creature, but Jesus the second Adam, has come to bring us to the fullness of life. The earthly man is a secular man who tries to be a decent person, but he is also self-focussed so he has to live constantly with compromise.

Jesus came from heaven to show us the pattern of heavenly living which is what his disciples must aim for. The key to transitioning from earthly values to heavenly values is love. Love requires us to do good to others, even our enemies. Love : bless; love : give; love : lend; love : be merciful.

Love must be the motivation of every Christian in all our thoughts and actions because it is love that transforms human nature and reverses the values of the pagan secular world. The secular world promotes reciprocity – ‘You scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours,’ or ‘Forgive your enemies but first get even.’ This is how Jesus’ first disciples behaved before Pentecost. James and John wanted permission from Jesus to send fire down on those villagers that would not receive them when on their missionary journey (Lk 9:54). Simon Peter drew his

sword and struck off the High Priest's servant's ear when they came to arrest Jesus (Jn 18:10).

But after Pentecost, following their empowerment with the Holy Spirit, these same men 'rejoiced because they suffered dishonour because they proclaimed Jesus (Acts 5:41).

Only God's presence enables us to live a heavenly life in the here and now. Only the gift of the Holy Spirit enables us to make sense of what Jesus teaches. It is love that is the key that enables us to love God and one another in the way that Jesus loves us. It's true – all we need is love, so long as it is the love that Jesus taught.

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