

Sunday Message

SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

THE WORD

Year A • 19 February 2023 • Psalter Week 3

THE EXTRA MILE

(MATTHEW 5:38-48)

Today's Gospel offers the last two instances from the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus puts a new interpretation on the law of Israel. Jesus takes the old Jewish law a big step forward. We are to go the extra mile.

Jewish law was big into external observance. Keep the law, and you were all right. It didn't matter what kind of person you were on the inside – in the heart – so long as you followed the law line by line.

Jesus' law is very different. It's not just about sticking to the letter of the law. It's about the kind of person you are, your whole way of living and relating to others – a move from keeping rules to showing love and mercy.

We see that contrast played out in today's Gospel. Jesus says: "You have learnt how it was said: Eye for eye and tooth for tooth. But I say this to you: offer the wicked person no resistance..."

"You have learnt how it was said: You must love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say this to you: love your enemy..."

You see the pattern: "You have learnt... But I say this to you..." The contrast is stark. The old way of living is no longer enough. We must now live according to the far more challenging new law of Jesus. It is a call to go the extra mile.

This new law of Jesus has vast implications for how we see and treat each other. Think of the terrible war in Ukraine. Think of the social divisions that exist in our country. Think of the divisions in our Church.

Now listen to the new law of Jesus again: love your enemies; extend the hand of friendship; be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. We must always go the extra mile. ■

LEARN

The Christian loves everybody without distinction.

The command to love our neighbour is central to our faith.

The Christian keeps the spirit and not just the letter of the law.

PRAY

There is so much hatred in our world today, so much division, suspicion, racism. Pray for a world that lives by the values of the Sermon on the Mount.

SAY

Lord, help me always to be a channel of your love and peace.

DO

Reach out to somebody you have stopped talking to or who has stopped talking to you. Do it no matter how difficult it may be.

REFLECT

Manuel Sanchez drives a refuse truck in California. He noticed that one little boy's favourite activity was watching the garbage being picked up at his home every Monday. Daniel was five years old and autistic.

In a video posted on social media, Daniel's mother explained how her son used to be afraid of the truck but that his fear eventually grew into a love of trash day.

"He waits all week for Monday morning pickup," she said. "He knows exactly which bins are picked up each week, and Sundays are special for him when he takes the bins out with his dad.

"Our garbage recycle man, known only to us as Manuel, is his favourite. He always has a big smile for Daniel, who is faithfully waiting for him every Monday. To Daniel, trash pickup is like a symphony. He synchronises his hand movements with the truck," she wrote.

One Monday morning, Mr Sanchez pulled up outside the family home as usual, to

Daniel's absolute delight, and then asked Daniel's mother if it would be okay to give her son a present.

He then got out of the truck and walked over to Daniel with a bag. Inside was a large plastic truck – a toy version of the garbage truck.

Daniel was so overcome by the gift that all he could say was a quiet "Thank you."

"One man, one moment, touching the life of an autistic child... our hearts are overflowing," Daniel's mother wrote in a Facebook message. The video showing Mr Sanchez's surprise for Daniel quickly went viral.

Later it transpired Mr Sanchez had bought the truck out of his own money. It was a beautiful act of love. He didn't have to do it. Nobody would have expected him to do it – but he did it anyway. You could say he went the extra mile.

And that's what today's Gospel is about too. It's about going the extra mile.

In today's second reading, there is a line that gets to the heart of why we must go the extra mile. St Paul reminds the people of Corinth that they are God's temple. The Jewish people believed that God dwelt in the great Temple in Jerusalem. The Temple was God's earthly dwelling place. But St Paul reminds us that God lives in each of us, that God's Holy Spirit dwells in each of us. Each of us is a temple of God – and so each of us is unique, precious, priceless, irreplaceable.

Since each of us is a temple of God, that must shape how we see and treat each other. He mightn't have articulated it like that, but that's how Mr Sanchez saw little Daniel – as someone who reflected God's presence in a particularly beautiful way because of his condition.

Living the Sermon on the Mount is about seeing and treating everyone – everyone – as God's holy temple. What a different world we would have, and what different debates we would conduct if we could act like that. ■

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

O Lord, I trust in your merciful love.
My heart will rejoice in your salvation.
I will sing to the Lord who has been bountiful
with me.

GLORIA

Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to people of good will.

We praise you,
we bless you,
we adore you,
we glorify you,
we give you thanks for your great glory,
Lord God, heavenly King,
O God, almighty Father.

Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
you take away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us;

you take away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father,
have mercy on us.

For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.

COLLECT

Grant, we pray, almighty God,
that, always pondering spiritual things,
we may carry out in both word and deed
that which is pleasing to you.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of
the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

FIRST READING Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18

A reading from the book of Leviticus.

The Lord spoke to Moses; he said: "Speak to the whole community of the sons of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy.

"You must not bear hatred for your brother in your heart. You must openly tell him, your neighbour, of his offence; this way you will not take a sin upon yourself. You must not exact vengeance, nor must you bear a grudge against the children of your people. You must love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord."

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

PSALM Psalm 102

Response:

The Lord is compassion and love.

1. My soul, give thanks to the Lord,
all my being, bless his holy name.
My soul, give thanks to the Lord
and never forget all his blessings. (R.)
2. It is he who forgives all your guilt,
who heals every one of your ills,
who redeems your life from the grave,
who crowns you with love and
compassion. (R.)

3. The Lord is compassion and love,
slow to anger and rich in mercy.
He does not treat us according to our sins
nor repay us according to our faults. (R.)
4. As far as the east is from the west
so far does he remove our sins.
As a father has compassion on his sons,
the Lord has pity on those who fear him.
(R.)

SECOND READING 1 Corinthians 3:16-23

A reading from the first letter of St Paul to the Corinthians.

Didn't you realise that you were God's temple and that the Spirit of God was living among you? If anybody should destroy the temple of God, God will destroy him, because the temple of God is sacred; and you are that temple.

Make no mistake about it; if any one of you thinks of himself as wise, in the ordinary sense of the word, then he must learn to be a fool before he really can be wise. Why? Because the wisdom of this world is foolishness to God. As scripture says: The Lord knows wise men's thoughts: he knows how useless they are; or again: God is not convinced by the arguments of the wise. So there is nothing to boast about in anything human: Paul, Apollos, Cephas, the world, life and death, the present and future are all your servants; but you belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God.

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!
When anyone obeys what Christ has said,
God's love comes to perfection in him.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL Matthew 5:38-48

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

Jesus said to his disciples: "You have learnt how it was said: Eye for eye and tooth for tooth. But I say this to you: offer the wicked man no resistance. On the contrary, if anyone hits you on the right cheek, offer him the other as well; if a man takes you to law and would have your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone orders you to go one mile, go two miles with him. Give to anyone who asks, and if anyone wants to borrow, do not turn away.

"You have learnt how it was said: You must love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say this to you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; in this way you will be sons of your Father in heaven, for he causes his sun to rise on bad men as well as good, and his rain to fall on honest and dishonest men alike. For if you love those who love you, what right have you to claim any credit? Even the tax collectors do as much, do they not? And if you save your greetings for your brothers, are you doing anything exceptional? Even the pagans do as much, do they not? You must therefore be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect."

The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.
I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with
the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
(all bow during the next three lines)
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the
Virgin Mary,
and became man.
For our sake he was crucified under
Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,
the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is adored
and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
I believe in one, holy, catholic and
apostolic Church.
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness
of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the
dead
and the life of the world to come.
Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

As we celebrate your mysteries, O Lord,
with the observance that is your due,
we humbly ask you,
that what we offer to the honour of your
majesty
may profit us for salvation
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

I will recount all your wonders,
I will rejoice in you and be glad,
and sing psalms to your name, O Most High.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Grant, we pray, almighty God,
that we may experience the effects of the
salvation
which is pledged to us by these mysteries.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

The friend who can be silent with us in a
moment of despair or confusion, who can stay
with us in an hour of grief and bereavement,
who can tolerate not knowing, not healing, not
curing: that is a friend who cares.

Henri Nouwen