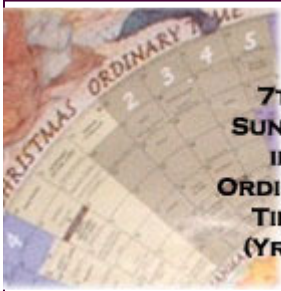


Seventh Sunday of the Year A



Matthew 5:38-48

38 Jesus said to his disciples: 'You have learnt how it was said: 'Eye for eye and tooth for tooth. 39 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; 40 if a man takes you to law and would have your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. 41 And if anyone orders you to go one mile, go two miles with him. 42 Give to anyone

who asks, and if anyone wants to borrow, do not turn away.

43 'You have learnt how it was said: You must love your neighbour and hate your enemy. 44 But I say this to you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; 45 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. 46 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? 47 And if you save your greetings for your brothers, are you doing anything exceptional? 48 Even the pagans do as much, do they not? You must therefore be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect.'

Other readings: Leviticus 19:1-2,17-18 Psalm 102 (103) 1 Corinthians 3:16-23

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus has stated his intention to bring the Law and the Prophets to fulfilment. Jesus challenges and deepens the Jewish law. He repeats: 'You have heard it said, but I say this to you!' In today's gospel we hear how Jesus presents two further tenets of the law.

The instruction 'eye for eye, tooth for tooth' was a way of ensuring that retribution, repaying evil for evil, did not get out of control. Punishment should always be proportionate to the crime committed. Jesus, however, instructs his disciples not to pay back evil for evil. This is a difficult teaching for people of today, and indeed of any time, for it urges us to endure without retaliating when evil is done to us.

The climax of this part of the Sermon on the Mount, the last of the series of 'antitheses' in which Jesus contrasts traditional teaching with his new way, involves the love of enemies. For traditional Jewish understanding hatred of enemies was allowed. But Jesus presents the love of enemies as basic to Christian life. Once again a stern challenge is thrown down to our natural inclinations and actions. It is not surprising that Jesus goes on to say: 'Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect!' To live the Christian life is to make God's compassion and love the measure of our actions. Jesus himself will live out these teachings. He will forgive those who crucify him.

Am I open to the challenges the gospel brings?

Do I take seriously the command to 'be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect'?

We pray for those whose lives are poisoned by hatred.

We pray for a new heart and a new spirit.