

Cycle A – Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time – Feb. 19, 2023

“Turn the other cheek ...”

OPENING PRAYER (Psalm 103)

Leader: It is the Lord who forgives, It is the Lord who heals,
It is the Lord who redeems our lives.

All: **The Lord is merciful and gracious.**

Leader: As far as the east is from the west,
So far he removes our transgressions.
As a father has compassion
For his children, so the Lord has compassion for us.

All: **Bless the Lord, O my soul,
And all that is within me, bless his holy name.
Amen**



First Reading – Leviticus 19: 1-2, 17-18

Leviticus is largely made up of laws to regulate religious and ethical aspects of life. This is one of the older parts of the book, and presents a code that challenges God’s chosen people to imitate their Lord in holiness and in love of neighbour. Hating in our hearts, reproving our neighbour, taking vengeance, or bearing a grudge are not “Godly” in any sense of the word. The commandment is clear: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”

1. What word or phrase in this scripture passage resonates in your heart? Can you explain why?
2. Where does love of one’s “self” fit into the picture of loving others?

Second Reading – 1 Corinthians 3:16-23

Paul wrote this letter to the people of Corinth as a simple and profound attempt to bring the Gospel to those who lacked formal education. In Jewish culture of the time, the Temple was honoured above all buildings, and the most sacred part was the inmost shrine, the dwelling place of the Lord. Paul assures the Christians that their very bodies are the Temple of God, the dwelling place of the Lord, and must be preserved from evil and defilement. He then returns to his theme of wisdom. Paul assures the community that while the wisdom of the world is nothing in the face of God’s wisdom, Christ is everything.

1. Compare Paul’s understanding of the body in this passage with the prevalent messages about the body in our consumer society.
2. How can we help one another retrieve a deep personal sense of the sacredness of our bodies?

Gospel – Matthew 5:38-48

The beautiful and challenging “Sermon on the Mount” continues with words from Jesus that present a radical call to love, forgiveness and non-violence. His words echo the first reading’s call to “love your neighbour,” with Jesus offering powerful, counter-cultural examples. While legalistic eye-for-eye justice seems fair to us, Jesus calls for a new way of responding, a new way of living, a much more radical and loving response. Turning the other cheek, giving more than we are sued for, lending to all who ask, and loving our enemies – this is how we are called to imitate our perfect, loving God.

1. Is it possible to respond in the loving way that Jesus is demanding? Can you recall examples of those who have lived this call?
2. Judgment and revenge seem natural responses to being hurt. What can help us to instead offer peace and goodness?
3. Has a loving response in the face of difficulty ever made a difference in your own life? Has God’s generous love ever moved you to love an enemy?

LIVING THE WORD

What is God’s challenge for me this coming week?

PRAYING THE WORD

Intercession: May the love of God in our lives inspire us to ever-greater love and service of those on the margins: the poor, the isolated and the forgotten.
We pray to the Lord.

Invite other intentions, then end with “Our Father ...”

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: Lord Jesus, you summon us to be perfect,
As your heavenly Father is perfect.

All: **We confess our narrow, conditional loving
And desire your divine capacity of radical loving and forgiving.**

Leader: You call us to forgive, to love our enemies,
and to pray for those who persecute us.

All: **We recommit ourselves to your radical loving
Help us to be your active presence in the world.
Amen.**

Leader: Let us share with one another the sign of Christ’s peace.