

7th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today we hear again the extraordinary teachings of Jesus that changed the world for ever. By refusing to hate, we can make our world a better place for everyone.

Today's Readings

1 Samuel 26:2. 7-9. 12-13. 22-23

Though the king set out with an army to kill him, David refrained from harming Saul, even when the opportunity presented itself.

1 Corinthians 15:45-49

Human beings have bodies. Yet a physical being may become spiritually minded and bear the image of Christ.

Luke 6:27-38

People who are truly God's children resemble their heavenly Father in showing indiscriminate kindness, even towards their worst enemies.



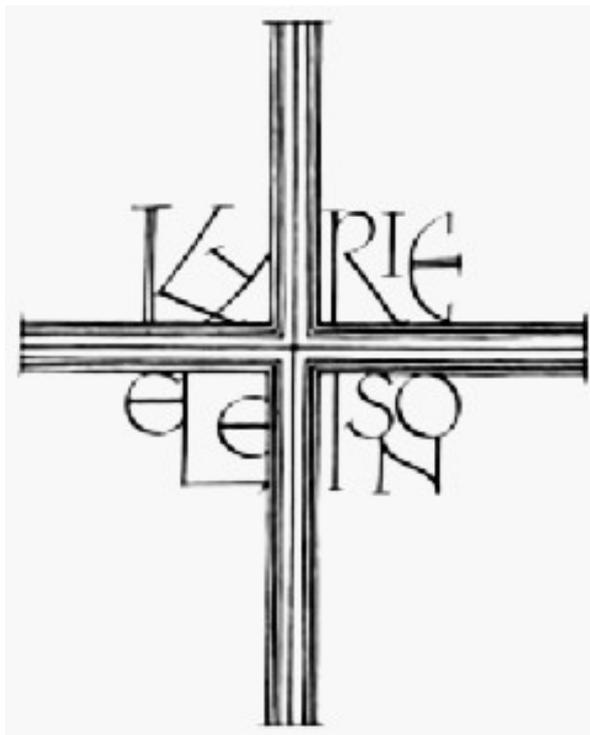
“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.”

Ice cream, chocolates, doughnuts... we all crave sweetness. Sugary food may not be the healthy option, but it triggers the release of feel-good chemicals in the brain that give a momentary rush of pleasure.

The thought of getting even with people who hurt us, does the same thing. Neuroscientists have discovered that revenge really is “sweet”; the same part of the brain that’s responsible for reward also governs vengeance. Like eating things full of sugar, thinking about how to get our own back seems irresistible.

You might say it’s not just irresistible, but justified. After all, revenge is provoked by someone else’s wrongdoing. Taking matters into your own hands may be tempting where there is no effective system of justice. However, so-called “honour killings” still take place even in the most advanced societies when people react with extreme violence to protect their reputation or their family name.

Revenge may be sweet, but it is a sweetness of the bitterest kind. It doesn’t try to reform the offender’s behaviour but to inflict pain. The ‘sweetness’ is only momentary, for after the “sugar rush” comes feelings of despondency. Research has found that an act of vengeance merely intensifies our focus on the wrongdoer and makes us brood even more on what they have done to us. In the end, people are no happier for getting their own back.



Jesus taught us to “love our enemies”. The idea sounded preposterous at the time. The Jewish nation was under occupation and its people felt justified in despising their Roman oppressors, as well as anyone outside their own religion. Revenge was enshrined in Jewish Law; we get the phrase “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” from there. The commandment to “love your neighbour” was important to the Jewish people, but they understood the term “neighbour in a very restricted way – that’s why Jesus told the parable of the good Samaritan. Jesus taught that every human being is our neighbour and that peace is something anyone can make. He detailed the kind of provocations

people might face and suggested radical ways of dealing with them. You might, for example, treat your enemies well, only to find that they treat you badly in return. So what do you do? Keep on loving them just the same. If they mutter curses, mutter blessings back. If they abuse you, pray for them. If they slap you in the face, give them the other cheek to slap. If they pinch your coat, hand over your shirt as well. Whatever they might take, let them. Don’t ask for it back.

This was revolutionary talk, a completely undefended way of being. It ran counter to the human instinct to be self-protective. Kindliness is natural within families and between friends, and easy enough when it is in our interests. Jesus, however, taught *indiscriminate* kindness to everyone, even when it is never reciprocated, nor likely to bring us any benefit. Why? Because that's the way God is, forgiving the ungrateful; showing kindness to the undeserving. Be like God, said Jesus.



WE all get annoyed from time to time. Anger is natural, but it need not trigger insults or violence. After the flaring up of irritation comes a choice and, by a steadfast refusal to retaliate and a quiet insistence on meeting negativity with goodness, we choose to imitate the way God is with us.

At the same time, the loving choice may be to stand up to unacceptable behaviour, to be protective, or to help people understand the consequences of their action. That's not revenge. Love restores, teaches, and heals: it does not harm or destroy.

More important than feeling love for our enemies is *showing* love. It was by watching how Jesus showed love that people began to understand what God is like. When Jesus, with his dying gasp, forgave those who were crucifying him, the Roman officer said in amazement, "In truth this man was a son of God."

Everyone who imitates the loving forbearance of God are recognisably God's children. People can see God's likeness in us whenever we look for the good in other people. Jesus calls us to transcend our instinctive behaviour in order to imitate the ways of God. And it's as we forgive other people that God forgives us. Jesus used the colourful analogy of a person who deals out as generous a measure as possible, pressing it down and shaking the container to make space for more. That's the way God pours love and mercy into our hearts and lives.



‘Synod’ and ‘Synodal’ are rather obscure words. Another way to think of it is as ‘Walking together.’ It is not something that will be accomplished in 2023; it is something that the Church will become in the future.

Not a new Church – but a different Church:
‘A listening, discerning Church’

GOSPEL WORDSEARCH

N	O	D	R	A	P	S	B	O	R	LOVE	CONDEMN
E	M	E	N	E	M	I	E	S	E	HATE	CLOAK
D	C	E	E	C	H	Y	L	I	T	BLESS	REWARD
R	E	U	D	O	R	A	P	N	U	CURSE	WICKED
A	M	K	R	N	P	R	T	N	R	PRAY	SINNERS
W	K	E	C	S	O	P	T	E	N	SLAPS	RECEIVE
E	A	E	V	I	E	C	E	R	O	CHEEK	
R	O	H	R	O	W	A	R	S	D	TUNIC	
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