

7th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
(Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18 / Matthew 5:38-48)
23.02.2020

In the first reading from the Book of Leviticus, we heard Moses speaking on the Lord's behalf address these words to the whole community: "**Be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy**". In the gospel passage we heard Jesus say to his disciples: "**You must be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect**".

Clearly, we are asked by the Lord to be holy and to be perfect! What does that mean? What kind of holiness, what kind of perfection are we called to? In order to be holy or perfect, have we to forget our humanity and become disincarnate, spiritual beings, like angels? Are we called to be flawless perfectionists? Are we called to save ourselves by our own good actions? Certainly not! This is not the way to holiness or perfection. We are called to be holy, to be perfect as God is holy, as God is perfect.

To help us to grasp the meaning of this invitation, there is an evocative translation of that gospel's verse in the first edition of the Jerusalem Bible. Instead of "you must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" we read: "**Set no bounds to your love just as your heavenly Father sets none to his.**" To be holy, to be perfect is to love without bounds; it is to love all human beings without exception, our friends and our enemies; among whom, there may be those we are inclined to ignore or disdain, those to whom we are indifferent or who are indifferent to us. We are called to love with a boundless love which reflects the love with which our heavenly Father loves us, "He who causes his sun to rise on bad men and women as good, and his rain to fall on honest and dishonest men and women alike". When we love others as God loves us, we can no longer divide people into categories, distinguishing those who deserve our love from those who don't. When we love others as God loves us, nobody can be excluded from our love. To love as God loves us is to love with a force capable of transforming enemies into friends. This is the way to holiness and perfection in the image of our Heavenly Father; this is the way to love as God loves us. This is a grace to ask for in prayer and to receive as a gift.

The word 'love' and the verb 'to love' have multifaceted meanings. In a first approach, to love means to feel some affection for someone. From this perspective, the lover holds the first place: 'We' love someone. But when we love someone, the first place should be given to the person who is loved and not for ourselves. To love is to enter into relationship with others with the desire to respect them. To love is not to use or abuse others for our own gain, but to help them grow and become more and more who they are. To love is to help others to become fully alive. To love is about life. To love is also to serve as Jesus served when, for example, He washed the feet of his disciples. In order to serve we have to identify the basic needs of our neighbours and offer to them what they lack in their lives.

To love our enemy is not to walk up to him and give him a big hug. The risk there would be to give ourselves a good conscience without respecting our enemy. To love our enemy is to renounce keeping our heart closed to our enemy. To love our enemy is to open our heart to him, to allow life to circulate anew between us. To love our enemy is to choose that both of us be fully alive.

To love our enemies is a way of freedom which requires a lot of courage from us. When we have an enemy we are prisoners of that person in the sense that we are always thinking about them. This person preoccupies us and has control over our thoughts. We become jealous, resentful, filled with vengeance. We lose our peace. When we succeed in loving our enemies, we become free of them. We free ourselves by letting go of them, by loving them, caring for them. Each time we forgive an enemy we become a new person, a freer person, because we have let go of the anger inside us which was holding us in fear. We become free when we are able to love every human being with the divine love that forgives always, seventy seven times... over and over again.

Jesus invites us to pray for our enemies, that is to say to introduce God into our relationship with them. This is an invitation to look at our enemies as God looks at them. This is the way to receive from God as a gift the possibility of entering into relationship with our enemies. Life circulates anew between us.

Let us ask the Lord for the grace of a loving heart, a heart like his own. This is the way to evangelical perfection and holiness.