

7th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)  
(Leviticus 19:1-2. 17-18 / Matthew 5:38-48)  
19.02.2023

**Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect  
Be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy**

Dear brothers and sisters,

Two Sundays ago, the Lord said to us: “**You are the salt of the earth; you are the light of the world**”. Today, the Lord asks of us “**to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect**”, or, to use the words of the first reading we heard from the book of Leviticus: “**Be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy**”. If we take on board all these words spoken by the Lord, we cannot but be convinced that He takes us seriously. The Lord places His confidence and trust in us. The Lord has hope in us. He counts on our collaboration so that his kingdom may be revealed to the world today through us. It is up to us not to disappoint him in his expectation in our regard. What an honour for us, an honour which is also an exacting responsibility! But let us not be afraid: everything the Lord asks of us is possible with our good will and the help of his grace.

When the Lord asks us **to be perfect** as our heavenly Father is perfect, He does not ask us to be flawless, he does not ask us to commit no mistakes, he does not ask us to always get everything right. What He asks us is to be like Him, which means to love in an inclusive way. The Lord does not ask us to love our neighbour and hate our enemy, but to love our neighbour and to love our enemy, to love every human being without exception. The Lord asks us to act as our heavenly Father acts, He who causes his sun to rise on bad men and women, as well as good, and his rain to fall on honest and dishonest men and women alike. To be perfect is to choose to love all our brothers and sisters in humanity without exception as God loves them, beginning by those who surround us and enlarging the circle more and more. To be perfect is to love in an unlimited and all-inclusive way; it is to love as God loves

The most ancient version of the gospels we have is written in Greek. In Greek, there are many verbs to express the various meanings of our multifaceted verb ‘**to love**’. To love means so many things. In today’s gospel passage, the Greek word used to say “to love our enemies” is the verb ‘Agapao’. Belonging to the same root, the substantive ‘agape’ is known and used in many languages, English included. The “agape-love” of our enemies to which we are invited by Jesus does not mean a tender feeling of the heart, but a determination of the mind by which we choose to keep our heart open even to those we consider to be our enemies or who may consider us to be theirs.

Agape-love is the good will to remain in relationship with those we don’t like and who may not like us. Agape is a gift from God which enables us to conquer our natural tendency to anger and bitterness, and to replace it by invincible good will in regard to all. Agape-Love is contrary to withdrawing into our self. Agape-love is a free choice to remain in relationship with everyone, even if it is only a minimal relationship we maintain. Agape-love is the capacity to acknowledge the presence of the other, to look at the other, to speak to the other, even when there is a disagreement between us. If we want to love our enemies, both our own determination and the

grace of God are necessary. It is for this reason that Jesus invites us not only “to love our enemies, but also to pray for those who persecute us”.

To love our neighbour and to love our enemy, that is to say to love all human beings without exception is at the heart of the gospel especially in the scene of the Last Judgement of Matthew 25 in which Jesus identifies himself with everyone, especially those who are in need and those who suffer. This gospel theme has been developed by St Benedict in his Rule for monks in which he invites us to see Christ in the Abbot, in the sick brothers, in the guests, in the elderly and in the young, in other words in everybody. Everybody was created in the image and likeness of God, that is to say that there is something of God in each human being.

To love our enemies does not mean that it is not possible for us to express our disagreement with others. We have to do this when we are led in that direction by our conscience. What is important is the way we do it. We are not to do it to satisfy our desire for revenge, for vengeance; we are not to do it with hatred, bitterness or violence in our heart. But we are called to do it for the good of the person concerned and the good of all, or again in order to cure the person to whom we speak, to help that person grow.

Let us take an example. To love children is not to allow them to do as they like, to leave their misbehaviours go unchecked. Love would have us restrain children, to help them grow and protect them against themselves.

Or to take a more actual and sensitive example, we are called by Jesus to love both Volodimir Zelensky and Vladimir Putin. To love Vladimir Putin does not mean that we have to approve of his invasion of Ukraine, or to agree with his political perspectives. To love Vladimir Putin means that we don't give him up on him for always. It means that we don't execute him in our mind, but that we keep on hoping for a possible change of mind and heart in this man. To love Vladimir Putin means that we continue to pray for him with hope against all hope.

Let us ask the Lord for the grace to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect, to be holy as the Lord our God is holy.