

Christlike Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

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This Wednesday marks the start of our Lenten season. We get to enter the desert with Jesus with the goal of coming out of lent being more Christlike, but before we enter the season of lent, let us reflect on where we are. This Sunday, we find ourselves in ordinary time, for the past few weeks we have been hearing, digesting, and reflecting on what many consider the greatest sermon ever told, the sermon on the mount.

In the sermon on the mount, Jesus fulfills what Moses represented for the people of Israel with the original law. In the sermon we find the beatitudes, ways of happiness, we find warnings, we find encouragement but also many challenges. Today specifically I find the message challenging because it seems like our LORD expects too much. In the first reading the LORD tells Moses that we are all to be holy because he is holy. To be holy is to be set apart, set apart for a reason, for a purpose, that reason, that purpose for us is to be Christlike. The second reading follows the theme by Paul telling the Corinthians that they are the temple of God, that the Spirit of God is in them, therefore they are holy. Finally, the gospel wraps up the theme by Jesus himself telling his disciples... be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.

This to me is very challenging, we are called to be holy, to be set apart, to be temples of the Holy Spirit, to be perfect, **to be Christlike**, but the challenge doesn't end there. In his sermon Jesus uses a comparison of the original law of Moses with the new law, when we hear *you have heard that it was said... but I say...* he is comparing what was established to the new. At times it is thought that the original law of Moses, the commandments were very restrictive, difficult to follow and difficult to live by, but Jesus comes to raise the bar even higher, he states:

- **You heard it said...** You shall not murder... **but I say...** if you are angry with your brother/sister you are liable.
- **You heard it said...** You shall not commit adultery... **but I say...** if you look at a woman with lust you have already committed adultery.
- **You heard it said...** Whoever divorces his wife, give her a certificate of divorce... **but I say...** anyone who divorces his wife commits adultery.
- **You heard it said...** You should not swear falsely... **but I say...** do not swear at all.
- **You heard it said...** An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth... **but I say...** offer no resistance to one who is evil.
- **You heard it said...** You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy... **but I say...** love your enemies.

Jesus brings the fulfillment of the law to the heart; he doesn't just focus on the action but moves past it to the intentions. Before breaking the law, there was an intention in the heart and that is his new law. I find the... **you heard it said**... statements very challenging because they go deep into the core of my being, they go into my intentions. Today's specific two are **retaliation**... an eye for an eye **and love of enemy**. They are difficult to me because they go against what I want to do... but one way in which I can be more Christlike and practice his sermon on the mount message is through **forgiveness**.

Forgiveness in a way allows me not to retaliate, to turn the other cheek as well as to love my enemies. Forgiveness is not simply an emotion or feeling but it is an act of will, I need to choose to forgive. It doesn't mean that it is easy or that the hurt will go away or that I will be restoring the relationship with who hurt me, but forgiveness will free me, it will liberate me, it will help me be more Christlike.

To forgive does not mean that you pretend that you were not hurt, it doesn't mean that your wounds are suddenly healed or gone, forgiveness means that you make the decision not to hold what was done to you against the person any longer. It doesn't mean that they are free from making reparation for any damage that they have caused, it means that you have made the decision to let it go. The other person might not want to forgive, be forgiven or they might just not be ready for forgiveness, but if you forgive you liberate yourself. It doesn't mean that you automatically trust the person that hurt you, forgiveness is releasing he/she who owes you from their debt to you. In the parable of the unmerciful servant, we find one who owed an immense amount and was forgiven but then he turned around and didn't forgive a smaller amount owed to him, because of this he ended back with his burden and unforgiven. Jesus also says he who is forgiven much, loves much. You and I have been forgiven much and therefore we are called to forgive much and to love much.

We are called to forgive in the Lord's prayer, we are asked to forgive in the sermon on the mount, because Christ forgives us, and we are called to be Christlike. Forgiveness means to give the hurt, the wounds, the person that hurt you, to the LORD, his justice, his mercy. The decision to forgive can only truly take place with God's grace. **To forgive is to say I know that I have been hurt, I know that I am called to forgive, and I can't do it alone, therefore LORD, I render it to you, please accept it and release me of this burden.**

The sacrament of forgiveness is the sacrament of reconciliation it allows us to receive the grace of forgiveness but also helps us release our burdens of unforgiveness, as we prepare to start a new Lenten season, **I encourage you to forgive and to allow yourself to be forgiven.**

The sermon on the mount is challenging us to be holy, to be perfect, **to be Christlike...**
Forgiveness is one action that will get us closer to become holy, perfect...
Christlike...