

Sermon for 18.2.17

During the week while reflecting on the sermon I came across this little rhyme,

*The rain it raineth every day,*

*Upon the just and unjust fella;*

*But more upon the just, because*

*The unjust hath the just's umbrella.*

The Father sends his rain equally on the righteous and on the unrighteous.

With these words in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us that the Father loves us all and he issues a profound call that we should treat ourselves, our enemies and our friends as God does with the same love.

Jesus proposes the kind of justice that is creative and healing and such a way emanates from the way he himself lived.

The old Jewish law said: 'Eye for eye and tooth for tooth'. This was enacted to limit revenge, rather than encourage it. If someone takes out one of your eyes, you are not entitled to take out both of his. That would only escalate the violence. So the old law aimed to limit human wickedness, but it could not eradicate it.

In contrast, Jesus says do not seek vengeance at all, but 'Turn the other cheek'.

Now in the culture of the day to be slapped with the back of the hand on the right cheek was a gross insult; it implied that the person hit is inferior.

By offering the other cheek, you are effectively saying: 'Hit me again if you wish; but this time, treat me as an equal, not as an inferior'. Jesus says it is far better to find a creative way forward, reflecting the patient love of God himself for in such a response the foundation for further movement remains open rather than closed off or shut down.

Similarly, Jesus says that if your opponent in a law suit would take the shirt off your back, give him your vest too. In those days in Palestine, a poor man would have just two garments: a cloak and a shirt. By surrendering both of them, you show your opponent that there is no limit to what you will do to show compatibility.

It also shows the opponent his own actions of attempting to reduce the dignity of a human being by being offered all they have.

Again, you may be obliged to carry some equipment for a Roman soldier. The military had the right to make civilians do this, but only for one mile, not more. Very well then, says Jesus: surprise him by offering to go two miles.

That is far more constructive than making an official complaint, or plotting revenge by joining a violent resistance movement. You would be showing the Romans that there is a different way to be human, a very different way to their way of repression and violence. A way that reveals God's victory over all oppression, injustice and inequality.

I believe it is of interest to note that these three scenes, highlight the way of response. In each scene the response speaks about someone who lives in true inner freedom. About someone who is not restricted by –hatred, resentment, anger, vengefulness, judgment or self-righteousness. Therefore, I believe it is of much benefit, for each one of us to be aware in any given situation of our response that stirs in us anger, annoyance, resentment or self-righteousness.

It can be very helpful to sit quietly with God, and reflect objectively, that is, without justification, on these. During such reflective introspection in the companionship of the Holy Spirit, we can learn much about ourselves and ultimately be led into the process of healing and maturity in Christ.

Just to offer a personal example here of a road incident that happened while driving back from the north coast. We were driving at 110 kilometres and a car passed us on the inside lane, came into our lane and terrible braked. Thankfully our driver's response was instant and we were able to avoid an accident.

My response, however to the other driver was anger.

It was a personal affront that stirred the anger in me – how dare this person do such a thing. He could have killed us all.

I'm still working on why I took the incident so personally and I know from experience that it's a deep process that takes time, patience, gentleness and mercy.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is really giving us good news about being authentically human. We witness this authenticity in his own life in which He shows us the way in our humanity to be the temple of God.

Through the stories in the gospels he shows us the way. He talks in parables, quizzical stories that teaches a different perspective – a different way to look at things.

By the very way he lives - he shows us the way.

In his Passion when his accusers mocked him, his response was silence.

When they struck him and scourged him, he suffered the pain.

When they made him carry the burden of the cross, the ultimate symbol of Roman domination and victory over their enemy, he carried it as far as he was able, and then submitted to the help of a fellow human.

Together they brought it to the place of execution; and as the soldiers hammered in the nails he prayed for them.

I believe the Sermon on the Mount is much more than a blueprint for our moral behaviour.

It is really a description of Jesus himself, the way he lived, and the way he leads us into life to the fullest.

He is poor in spirit in the strength of humility, he is meek and full of merciful.

He does not resist the one who is evil, but turns the other cheek.

He loves both neighbour and enemy.

He perseveres to the end and resurrects all things.

He shows us God's way to be fully human, holy and perfect as

God's temple in the world, in the power of the Spirit.

We who follow him are on the journey. We too can be patient and merciful to ourselves and others, we too can be open to change as we go forward in creativity and healing to the fullness of our true humanity through Christ.

Amen.

The Lord be with you.