

We Are All Brothers and Sisters, Children of Our Heavenly Father

Daily Gospel / Liturgical Cycle B

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Holy Gospel of Jesus Christ according to Saint Matthew 5:43-48.

Jesus said to his disciples: "You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same? So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Introductory Prayer:

Lord, you present a message that is not easy for my fallen nature to accept. However, I believe in your words, and I trust in you because you alone have the words of eternal life. As I begin this moment of prayer, I turn to you as one in need. I want only to please you in all I do.

Petition:

Lord, help me to love my enemies and pray for those who persecute me.

1. True Love for Your Enemies:

Nowhere does the radical newness of the Christian ethic stand out more clearly than in Christ's simple phrase: "Love your enemies." There are four words for "love" in Greek. *Storge* refers to the love between parents and children. *Eros* is the love of attraction between man and woman. *Philia* is the love of friendship. Finally, *agape* is love as goodwill, benevolent love that cannot be conquered, a love that wills only the good for the person loved. In his book, *Love and Responsibility*, Karol Wojtyla remarks that to love someone with truly benevolent love is to will God for them, since God is the supreme good of each human person. It is precisely love as *agape* that Christ asks from every one of his followers: "Pray for those who persecute you."

2. "Children of Your Heavenly Father":

Why does Christ ask, even demand, of us such a radical form of love? Precisely because that is how God the Father loves each and every one of his sons and daughters, with no consideration of whether they are good or evil. "For he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust." How much the world around us would change if those with whom we came into contact perceived in us a love like that of the Father of mercies! His love is absolutely without self-interest. He continues to love and pour forth his gifts even when he is not loved in return. Christ calls us to a lofty and challenging ideal, but one that is capable of transforming lives. What joy could be greater than to be true sons and daughters of our heavenly Father?

3. Seeking True Perfection Through Love:

Why is Christ almost relentless in insisting that we must be perfect — and not just a human perfection, but as our heavenly Father is perfect? He knows that is the Father's original plan for mankind, from the dawn of creation. "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27). Christ is well aware that sin has darkened the divine image within us, that his call to perfect charity is not possible for our fallen human nature. But he is equally aware that by the power of his own death and resurrection, through the new life of the Holy Spirit whom he will send, God's original plan for mankind will be restored. There can be no more powerful motive for hope, even in the midst of our own failures in charity and our human weaknesses.

Conversation with Christ:

Thank you, Lord, for your radical message, for the constant challenge it is to me, never allowing me to become complacent or self-satisfied. Help me to be a better witness of Christian charity so that the world will believe in you.

Resolution:

I will pray for those with whom I am experiencing difficulties and do an act of charity for them.