

## Fr. Jins' Homily for the Seventh Sunday In Ordinary Time

Matthew 5:38-48

Today's readings explain the basis of Jewish and Christian morality, the Holiness of the loving, merciful and compassionate One God. God's chosen people were, and are, expected to be holy people sharing in God's Holiness by embodying His love, mercy and forgiveness.

The first reading, taken from the book of Leviticus, gives the Holiness code: "Be holy, for I, the Lord, your God, am Holy." It also gives us the way to share God's holiness: "Love your neighbor as yourself." The Responsorial psalm (Ps103) challenges us to be like our God – kind, merciful and forgiving — and it shows us the measure of perfection Christ asks us to bring to our relationships. In the second reading, St. Paul gives us an additional reason to be holy. We are to keep our bodies holy because we are the temples of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit lives in us. In the Gospel passage, taken from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus confirms, corrects, and expands the Ten Commandments. Here, Jesus condemns even the mild form of the "Law of the Talion," the Babylonian tribal law of restricted retaliation which Moses passed on to Israel. In its place, Jesus gives his new law of love, grace, forgiveness, reconciliation, and no retaliation. For Jesus, retaliation, or even limited vengeance, has no place in the Christian life, even though graceful acceptance of an offense requires great strength and discipline of character, as well as strengthening by God's grace. The second part of today's Gospel passage is the central part of the Sermon on the Mount. It presents the Christian ethic of personal relationships: love one's neighbors and forgive one's enemies. It tells us that what makes Christians different is the grace through which they treat others with loving kindness and mercy, even if they don't deserve it. We are commanded to love our enemies as Jesus loves us, with agápe love, not because our enemies deserve our love, but because Jesus loves them so much that he died for them as he did for us.

In the Gospel passage, taken from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches us four ways of becoming holy as God is holy.

The first way is to abstain from all forms of retaliation. Jesus discards even the milder form of retaliation developed by Hammurabi in ancient Babylon and passed on to Israel through Moses. The policy was one of limited, proportional retaliation "an eye for an eye, a tooth for tooth," rather than allowing unlimited vengeance. In place of this limited, proportional retaliation, Jesus gives his new law of love, grace, forgiveness, reconciliation, and no retaliation. For Jesus, retaliation, or even limited vengeance, has no place in the Christian life, even though graceful acceptance of an offense requires great strength, discipline of character, and strengthening by God's grace. The second way of becoming holy as God is Holy is to take the offense gracefully and love the offender. Jesus illustrates this in three images: "turning the other cheek, freely giving the tunic and adding the cloak to it, and walking the extra mile." Jesus tells us that what makes Christians different is the grace with which they treat others, offering them loving kindness and mercy as God does for us, even if they don't deserve this treatment. We are commanded to love our enemies as Jesus loves us, with agápe love, not because our enemies deserve our love, but because Jesus loves them so much that he died for them as he did for us. The third way of sharing in God's Holiness is by unconditionally and whole-heartedly forgiving the offender without planning revenge in any form. This means not only loving one's neighbors, but also forgiving those enemies who hurt us and seem willfully to cause us suffering, hardship and unhappiness.

The fourth way of becoming holy as God is Holy is to seal our determination to forgive our enemies by sincerely praying for their spiritual and physical welfare and for the grace they need for their conversion and renewal of life. Thus, today's Scripture readings challenge us to become holy as our God is Holy by loving, forgiving, and blessing others, even our enemies with graceful and magnanimous love, as our Holy God does for us.

Dear brothers and sisters, we need to have a forgiving heart. Jesus demands that we should forgive, pardon, and be generous whether or not our offenders deserve it, and even if we are not loved in return. He also tells us to pray for those who, it may seem willfully, cause us suffering, hardship and unhappiness.

We are to try to be perfect, to be like God. We become perfect when we know God's will and act accordingly. We can do so because the Holy Spirit has been given to us, and He dwells within us, empowering us to do God's will. We become perfect when we try to love as God loves, to forgive as God forgives, and to show unconditional good will and universal benevolence as God does. All this we can do only with His ongoing Grace for which we need to ask, and then to receive and use.