

The Gospel today is actually a continuation of last week's message when Luke presented his version of the Beatitudes. Remember, "Blessed are the poor, the hungry and those who weep". It's where Jesus preaches about the guiding principles of His kingdom, and its demands. But the words we hear today are perhaps the most challenging of all. He reminds us of the need to forgive others and accept those who hate and mistreat us. And His teaching should remind us with what it means to be a disciple: He says, "Love your enemies, turn the other cheek, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Give to those who ask, lend without expecting repayment, and judge not, lest you be judged."

These teachings of Jesus are so against our modern ways of thinking. Can we truly love our enemies? Can we really turn the other cheek? Today's Gospel reminds us that we are here to follow the Lord, and to love like He did, and then to spend our lives serving Him. But that means we must be willing to give up everything. We are called to be perfect. And although we will never be without our imperfections, the more we allow God's love to make a difference in our lives with others, the more perfect we can become.

But, unfortunately, this message sounds so difficult. "Loving like He did" really doesn't sound so easy anymore, and in fact, we usually find that it's probably the most challenging thing we will ever be asked to do. So we often will take the easy way out, by choosing not to love when things get tough for us, or when our hearts get a little bruised, or when our hopes and dreams go up in smoke. As a result, if someone hurts us, we will try to take revenge and hurt them back. If they take something of ours, we will take something of theirs. If they gossip about us, we will gossip about them. If they cause us grief or heartache or disappointment, we will look for ways to do the same to them. We seem to continually answer evil with evil and expect the evil to go away. And all we're left with is twice as much evil.

So let's think about it, do we really believe in the power of God's love? Because that's what Jesus is trying to help us understand today! Believing in the power of love takes great faith. In faith, we will believe that love doesn't actually "eliminate" evil, but rather that it renders evil powerless, as long as we are willing to not place limits on where, and when, or whom we will love.

We can't expect the world to change if we ourselves are unwilling to change. The greatest impact we can have on the world is likely to occur when we choose to love during those times when we least want to, when we are badly hurt by others, when it feels nearly impossible to love them, and especially in those times when we just can't wait to get even with them. Thank goodness our God doesn't treat us that way, when we hurt Him.

Let's face it, if we can truly listen to what Jesus tells us today, love has no limits. We only need to look at the crucifix to realize the truth of what love is all about. So let's understand that the power of love has the unique ability to transform others; and that it has the power of forgiveness and the ability to reconcile others; and that it has the ability to heal wounds and change hearts. This is all possible, because of the power of God's love. It's only limited by our own unwillingness and our reluctance.

So today we are challenged to move away from our selective love of a few close friends and those in our family to a more universal love of all others. We need to take it a step at a time, and start with those that we just don't get along with. The next time you see them, just smile. At the grocery store let the person with only 2 or 3 items move in front of you in the checkout line. That's not so hard to do. And, of course, we need to pray; pray that God will change our hearts, set us free to love those who are different, and also heal our nation of hatred and division.

We are being asked in today's Gospel to believe in the power of God's love, not sometimes, but always, and be willing to choose to love in some of the most difficult of circumstances, and love as Jesus loved in those type of circumstances. Can we truly love our enemies? Can we really turn the other cheek, and do our part in helping to bring about a world, as God created it to be? Jesus showed us what is possible when we love unconditionally. And we just need to follow His example.