

7th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME; Cycle-C; Feb. 23rd 2025
1 Samuel 26:2, 7-9.12-13,22-23; 1Cor. 15:45-49; Luke 6:27-38

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

The moral teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapters 5-7 and the Sermon on the Plain in Luke chapter 6 give us the impression that Jesus taught all these topics in one sitting. In fact they are the summary form of the key teachings of Jesus which he carried out during his three years of Mission.

Among the many teachings of Jesus either in the Sermon on the Mount or Plain, the most controversial and challenging one is his command, **‘Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.’** These teachings sound good; but it is the most difficult ones to practice. The audience of Jesus, mainly the Jews, never heard anyone teaching them to love their enemies, forgive them and do good to them. Rather they were asked to destroy the enemies. The modern culture considers loving and forgiving the enemies as an act of the weaklings. I forgive my enemy because he is stronger than I am.

When Jesus speaks about the enemies he doesn't mean the primary enemies of our Christian life, such as **the world, the flesh and the devil**. He refers to our personal enemies and social enemies. Our personal enemies can be any persons; maybe a neighbors, family members or co-workers, who speak ill of me, hurt my feelings and oppose me or criticize me in whatever I do. How can I appreciate such individuals? The social enemies also hurt our civil conscience and disrupt our peaceful social life. They are the terrorists, rapists and child abusers. These people are a big threat to the existence of the society. How can I appreciate or love such people? Is not my love for them an encouragement for such criminals to do the worst crimes?

Then the question arises in our minds what Jesus means when he asks his disciples, **‘love your enemies?’** Can I love them as I love my family members or friends? In order to understand better the teachings of Jesus we need to understand **the word love in its full meaning**. In English language we use this word *love* very freely. Very often we use the word love for whatever we like. For instance, the person who says, I love my husband/wife/children, will use the same word, I love the show, I love pizza, I love to travel etc.

On the other hand **in Greek the word love** has three different meanings which stand for three different degrees of love. The first meaning of love is ***Eran***, which is the passionate love between the spouses. There is ***Philein***, which describes the love for our

dearest and nearest, especially family members. Neither of these meanings is used in this commandment of Jesus. The word used for love here is *Agapan*, which describes an active feeling or benevolence towards the other people. It means that no matter what others do to us we will never allow ourselves to desire anything but their good only. We cannot love our enemies as we love our nearest and the dearest ones. At least we can avoid wishing anything bad should happen to our enemies. We all love to hear that our enemies met with some disasters and we conclude that for their wrong doings they deserve them.

Love of enemies automatically follows the **forgiveness of enemies**. Love and forgiveness are the two sides of the same coin. If we have a benevolent love for our enemies we will be able to forgive them too. Unfortunately, this is the area where many good Christians fail. I have heard many say, “It is not possible to forgive someone who hurts your feelings.” If we keep unforgiving attitudes to anyone, the ill feelings, hatred and intolerance will inflate our hearts and even our personality will be changed eventually. Whereas when we forgive somebody from our hearts, once again we will enjoy the peace and joy of heart. Mahatma Gandhi says about forgiveness, **“The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.”** Forgiveness is the noblest and virtuous act. St Paul mirrors this teaching when he says in Ephesians 4:32, **“Be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another, as God has forgiven you in Christ.”**

Robert Enright, the founder of the International Forgiveness Institute at the University of Wisconsin, describes forgiveness as, **“Giving up the resentment to which you are entitled and offering to the person who hurt you friendlier attitudes to which they are not entitled.”** Once a young mother, whose soldier son was condemned to death pleaded to the French Emperor to Napoleon to forgive her son. But Napoleon retorted, “He doesn’t deserve forgiveness.” The mother replied, yes your Highness, he doesn’t deserve it; that is why I plead with you.” So in forgiving somebody you give up your right of resentment and give forgiveness to him/her who does not deserve it. Forgiveness is a decision we make, unconnected to the worthiness of the other person. We forgive so that we can let go of the bitterness and the hatred that rankle our souls. ***“To forgive is the highest, most beautiful form of love. In return, you will receive untold peace and happiness.” Robert Muller.***