

Read

Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18

Psalm 103:1-2, 3-4, 8,
10, 12-13

1 Corinthians 3:16-23

Matthew 5:38-48



REFLECTION

This week's "turn the other cheek" Gospel reading contains some of the most radical and challenging teachings of Jesus' ministry, but the key to the entire passage is the final instruction. Jesus tells us that we should strive to be perfect the way God is perfect. We cannot lose God's love because he is love. This isn't a weakness, but a strength. God remains perfectly who he is no matter what we choose to do.

In his article "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence" Martin Luther King Jr. writes about how nonviolence is not just a change in behavior, but is, at its core, a change of heart. The nonviolent, passive resistance of King's civil rights activists created a stark contrast that made it impossible to ignore the violence and evil of racism. Our actions as Christians should stand against the world, changing hearts and minds and transforming them into reflections of the kingdom of God.

QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ How does nonviolent protest or passive resistance create tension and expose injustice?
- ❖ God's nature is to be loving, generous, and creative. What is your nature?

LIVING THE WORD

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

February 19, 2023



ACTION

Think of someone who is always able to push your buttons. Do you feel more or less in control when you've been baited into losing your temper? Who holds the power in that interaction? Commit yourself this week to rise above when someone tries to goad you into acting out of anger instead of principle. Don't let other people use your emotions to control your path. Remember that by standing firm in the face of provocation, you are imitating Christ!



Read

Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous "Letter from Birmingham Jail": <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/02/letter-from-a-birmingham-jail/552461/>



February 19, 2023

SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LECTIONARY #79A

Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18

Psalms 103:1-2, 3-4, 8, 10, 12-13

1 Corinthians 3:16-23

Matthew 5:38-48

Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

Leader's Context

Today's Gospel is a very well-known passage. It is also a very difficult passage for us to hear because it requires our hearts to be transformed. Jesus again takes a teaching from the Old Testament and expounds upon it. Instead of punishment, we must offer reconciliation. Instead of hate and vitriol against our enemies, we must love them. He goes on to say that it is not merely enough to love those who love us. That is the easy way. Jesus challenges his disciples to go deeper, to give of themselves in greater ways, and to allow them to be transformed by his teachings.

Q FOCUS: *Loving your enemies and praying for them is the Christian way.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

This is the final Sunday in Ordinary Time before Lent begins. We celebrate Ash Wednesday this coming week, which marks the beginning of our Lenten journey. We receive ashes on our foreheads and are reminded of our Lenten disciplines of prayer, giving alms, and fasting. On Thursday of this week, we celebrate the feast day of St. Polycarp, a bishop and martyr. He was martyred for his faith around the year 155, and the story of his martyrdom is among the first full and reliable accounts of a Christian martyr's death.

Church Teaching Connection

"He [God] loves us unconditionally and when we welcome this divine love, then we can respond similarly. I love not only those who love me . . . but also those who do not love me. . . . This is Christian wisdom, this is the attitude of Jesus. And the highest point of holiness, let's put it that way, is to love one's enemies, which is not easy. Certainly, to love everyone, including enemies, is difficult. I would say it is an art!" (Pope Francis, General Audience, September 9, 2020).

Hear the Word

Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Matthew 5:38-48

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the Sign of the Cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

Jesus said to his disciples: "You have heard that it was said, *An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.* But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one as well. If anyone wants to go to law with you over your tunic, hand over your cloak as well. Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go for two miles. Give to the one who asks of you, and do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow.

“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.”

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

► Can you describe a time when you've experienced criticism online or felt attacked for something you posted?

► How about a time when you felt anger toward someone else online because you opposed what they were posting about (even if you didn't post anything in response)?

In today's culture and society, it is easy to find people with whom we disagree. The hate and mean-spiritedness that is sometimes cultivated online, especially on social media platforms, can make it seem as though we have many enemies. It can seem as though there are many people with whom we could never agree. The anonymity of social media emboldens many people to post outrageous notions, possibly even ideas with which one does not completely agree. Enemies seem to be all around us, and so listening to Jesus' teaching in today's Gospel can be an incredible challenge to us in our world today.

Think of those with whom you struggle, those with whom you disagree, now consider turning the

other cheek, allowing them to continue to aggravate or intimidate you. This is not a challenge that is easy to accept.

Of course, it is wise and healthy to remove ourselves from situations in which we feel attacked or in situations that might tempt us to react in anger and sin. Still, in taking those precautionary measures, it is important to keep Jesus' message from today's Gospel in mind. Jesus reminds us that he came to preach the Gospel of God's love for all. God does not discriminate or intimidate. God's love extends to all people, even those who spew hatred and vitriol.

► What would it look like in reality to turn the other cheek on social media? What are some practical things young people can do to follow Jesus' call to love our enemies in a digital world?

Jesus continues to remind his disciples that while it is good and noble to love your neighbors and to love those who love you in return, it is a more perfect kind of love if we can extend our care and love to our enemies. You might think that you do not have any enemies; however, there are likely people with whom you have experienced some difficulties. Maybe there is someone in your life who has treated you poorly, someone who has hurt you deeply. How can you change your heart so that you can extend love to that person as well? Prayer can be a powerful tool when wanting to soften your heart toward another person. Perhaps you can pray for that other person who has treated you badly.

► Where does prayer fit into the relationships you have with others on social media?

The last thing we hear from Jesus in the Gospel reading today is a huge charge given to us by Jesus: “So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Talk about impossible! We cannot be perfect, and Jesus knows this. However, he seems to be continuing to challenge us to fidelity in following his way. He knows that there is great difficulty in loving to this extent that he describes. He uses the impossible standard of perfection to keep his disciples on the path, to keep us striving to do better, love more, forgive more, and so much more. We can only be this kind of disciple with God's help!

Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the "Church Teaching Connection" on page 128.

Jesus' teachings in today's reading are some of the most difficult teachings of the Gospel.

It is difficult to love our enemies and to turn the other cheek when we are wronged.

We can only accomplish Jesus' teachings with God's help.

Act on the Word

Love Your Enemies

For this activity, you will need to create an inviting space for prayer, a bowl, slips of paper, pens, meditative music, and copies of the peace prayer attributed to St. Francis: "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace . . ." (this can be found online).

This is a prayerful activity. Invite the teens to settle into the prayer space and take a few moments of silence so everyone can get into the right frame of mind. Distribute the slips of paper and pens and copies of St. Francis' peace prayer. Give each person five slips of paper. Say these words or something similar: "We are going to spend a few moments reflecting on this Gospel passage. As I reread it, I invite you to close your eyes and envision those with whom you struggle, or those who have treated you badly."

Reread the Gospel passage to the teens. Allow for a few minutes of silence following your reading. Now, turn on the meditative music and invite the teens to write the initials of those people they have thought about on the pieces of paper. As they do so, invite them to also write the words "I pray for you" or "I entrust you to God" on the slips of paper.

After five to ten minutes of reflection and writing, invite the teens one by one to the bowl in the prayer space. Invite them to place all of their pieces of paper in the bowl and then return to their seat in the room. Once everyone has placed their papers in the bowl, say this or similar words: "We all have struggles and difficulties with people in our lives. We can find it difficult to love those who hurt us, those whom we perceive as our enemies. Today, we offer them up in prayer. We ask God to forgive them and to offer each one of us forgiveness as well." Then have everyone pray the peace prayer together. Invite the young people to pray for those they have written down throughout the week by praying this prayer at home.

Closing Prayer

*Gracious God,
you have set before us
the way to be holy.
Sustain in us the desire
to be perfect as the heavenly Father is
perfect and to love those who have
caused harm.*

*Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday's Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at www.ltp.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.