

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

LIVING THE WORD

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time February 23, 2020



REFLECTION

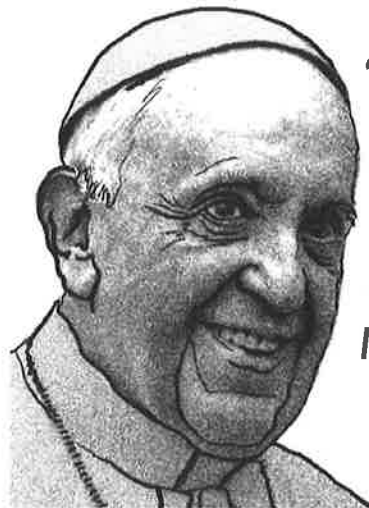
One of the earliest names for Christianity was “The Way,” and today’s Gospel account is perhaps the archetypal reason for this designation. Jesus insisted that following him required a fundamental change of heart that would manifest itself in all actions and interactions. Jesus presented a lifestyle, not a set of rules and regulations. This way of life is centered on compassion, forgiveness, and peace. This way is not about allowing others to take advantage of people, nor is it an excuse to totally ignore or shirk responsibilities. Rather, following Jesus requires practicing a law of love that sometimes contradicts the perceived laws of the world.

Jesus also highlights prayer as an essential element of the Way. It is one thing to forgive someone, but it is often much more difficult to pray for that person. Perhaps this is because prayer requires such intimacy and openness. This honesty with ourselves, others, and especially God allows us to grow in peace instead of resentment and hope instead of rage.



ACTION

Take some time today to pray for others by name. Of course, pray for all those you love, but also pray for those people who bother or anger you. Pray for the people you disagree with, and those who hold different beliefs and ideologies. Remember, prayer is about our own conversion of heart.



“Are you angry with someone? Pray for that person. That is what Christian love is.”

—Pope Francis

? QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today’s readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ How are you called to love your enemies?
- ❖ What conversion or growth do you need in your own heart?



February 23, 2020

SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LECTIONARY #79A

Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18

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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

The Sermon on the Mount continues with Jesus' teachings on retribution and the love of enemies. He reinterprets traditional teaching and offers a new way of living for his followers. This new way is rooted in authentic love of the other. It may not always be the easy way to live, but it is the right way.

Q FOCUS: *Move toward love.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

Lent begins this Wednesday with the annual distribution of ashes. This is a good opportunity to teach teens that Lent is about preparing to renew their Baptism at Easter. Every act of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving should be done with this in mind.

Church Teaching Connection

"Love . . . impels the followers of Christ to proclaim to all . . . the truth which saves. But we must distinguish between the error . . . and the person in error. . . . The teaching of Christ even demands that we forgive injury, and the precept of love, which is the commandment of the New Law includes all our enemies" (*Gaudium et spes*, 28).

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 the 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:

A familiar teaching for many of us begins today's Gospel reading, which is a continuation of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount from the Gospel of Matthew.

► **Is this teaching, one that focuses on retaliation, familiar to you?**

Jesus begins this teaching on retaliation by quoting a passage from the Old Testament's Book of Leviticus. The full verse and the one that precedes it read, "Anyone who inflicts a permanent injury on his or her neighbor shall receive the same in return: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. The same injury that one gives another shall be inflicted in return" (Leviticus 24:19–20). Originally, this Old Testament teaching was taught in order to place moderation on how someone should seek vengeance for being wronged: he or she is not to seek vengeance that is greater than the original injury that was incurred. Instead, the punishment for a crime that was committed was supposed to be equal to the original wronging. But Jesus has a different interpretation on how one is to respond when he or she is wronged.

► **What is your reaction to what Jesus is teaching?**

► **Do we see this form of response often within our world today?**

► **What would be some examples of when you have seen this type of compassionate response when someone has been hurt by another person?**

It takes quite a bit of courage and benevolence to respond in the way that Jesus is teaching us. Think about a time when someone else has hurt you or wronged you.

► **How did you respond?**

► **In reflecting upon that experience, how might you should have responded, in light of Jesus' teaching?**

In expanding upon the teaching that Jesus offers, he presents a number of examples of how one could live out that benevolent response. To name a couple: When you are hit on one cheek, you are to offer the other. When your coat is stolen, you are offer up another coat to the one who stole your first.

► **Do any of these examples resonate with you in your life today? Why or why not?**

The second teaching that Jesus offers in this passage centers on love. The custom that he initially cites is one that calls people to love their neighbors and allows for hatred of enemies. But Jesus again takes a teaching and spins it on its head. The common practice before Jesus' time was to offer love towards one's fellow countrymen and women. But the hatred enemies or evil people was accepted as an allowable stance. Jesus offers the disciples of his day, as well as we his disciples today, a radical new interpretation of how we are to engage others, our neighbors and our enemies alike. We are to pray for our enemies and to strive to follow the example of God the Father to love all.

► **Is it easy or hard for you to follow these instructions that Jesus offers us?**

► **Can you think of a time in which it was really difficult for you to show love to someone you just really didn't like?**

► **What made it difficult?**

► **How might you have responded better?**

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 140.

Jesus takes some of the Levitical teaching that had been the norm for his community and turns it on its head.

This revisioning of how God intends for us to live grows out of a foundation of love.

Christ calls all to love one another, even those whom we find most difficulty in loving?

Act on the Word

Turning the Other Cheek

For this activity, you will need a sheet of newsprint for each pair of youth and writing instruments.

Revisit today's Gospel reading in which Jesus instructs his followers to go against the Levitical norms of their community with regard to conflict and turn the other cheek. Divide the youth up into pairs and give each pair of students a sheet of newsprint and writing instruments. Invite them to think about how this teaching applies to their lived reality today. Have them turn their large sheets of paper so that they are in a landscape orientation, and tell them to draw two vertical lines down the paper so that they are left with three total columns.

On the top of the far left column, have them write the word "Examples of Conflict." On the top of the middle column, have them write, "Typical 21st Century American Response." And on the top of the far right column, have them write, "21st Century Christian Response." Next, instruct each pair to brainstorm a half-dozen (or more) examples of conflict that they are aware of in their world today and

write each of these in the "Conflict" column. Then, invite them to spend some time discussing, as a pair, first what they think the typical American response to that conflict is today and, second, what they feel the Christian response is to that particular example of conflict.

Once all of the pairs have had adequate time to brainstorm and record their examples of conflict and the various ways to respond to those forms of conflict, have them present what they have come up with to the larger group. Once all of the pairs have had their opportunity to present their findings, have a debriefing discussion to explore similarities and differences within what they have presented. Conclude the discussion with a focus on how realistic they feel responding to conflict in the way that Jesus calls us to, by turning the other cheek, is in today's real world.

Closing Prayer

Lord,
make us instruments of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let us sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.
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.