**SEVENTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR C**

**20th February 2022**

**First Reading**

**1 Samuel Chapter 26 vv 2, 7-9, 12-13 & 22-23**

You will see from the reference that the reading has been heavily excised. It is well worth reading the whole story in full from verses 1 to 25 in a recent translation. A more humorous though less edifying version of the same story may be found in Chapter 24:1-13 Both stories credit David with magnanimity but more importantly register David’s recognition of Saul’s divine authority. Good or bad, wise or foolish, Saul had been appointed King by God and could only be removed by God. The popular fear of regicide only began to fade after the execution of Charles the First. (1649 AD)

This reading has been chosen however because the less important lesson complements the gospel, an extract from the Great Sermon that illustrates Jesus' demand for forgiveness even toward enemies, as God has forgiven us.

Saul, who had welcomed the talented David into his service, soon became jealous of David's success and popularity. He had become convinced that David was a dangerous rival; he determined to get rid of him and pursued him with paranoid resolve. David was hounded through the wilderness of Judah until, in desperation, he put himself beyond Saul's clutches by becoming a mercenary of a Philistine prince, Achish of Gath (1 Samuel 27:1-7).

This passage is chosen for today's reading in view of Jesus' injunction to love one’s enemies.

**Second Reading 1 Corinthians 15:45-49**

Generally, in his letters, Paul addresses specific situations with individual people in mind. Sometimes it is difficult to understand Paul’s reasoning because we do not know the precise situation he was facing. Then again, as in this passage, we do not know if Paul was addressing a real person or an Aunt Sally of his own making.

The Corinthian Church of all the NT Churches, in particular, was composed of Christians drawn from many origins. (Corinth was a colony of retired soldiers, recruited from all parts of the Empire.) So many pet ideas were cherished, but especially those of Greek Gnosticism. Gnosticism included a wide range of ideas but in general it welcomed spiritual values and rejected physical ones.

By contrast, Judaism regarded the physical and spiritual as one whole and in a positive light, so that there was a broad range of opinions in the conflation between the two cultures.

In this passage, Paul is promoting the bodily resurrection of Jesus according to traditional Jewish preconceptions of Creation, physical and spiritual, while conscious that the Corinthians were always keen on the novel and sensational.

Having said all that, to-day’s passage draws a literary parallel between the story of Adam and the reality of Christ.

vv. 45-9 develop the contrast between the physical and spiritual bodies by reference to their two prototypes: Adam, the first man, made from the dust, who became mortal flesh (Genesis 2:7) and Christ, the final Adam, whose origin is heaven, and who is a life-giving and immortal spirit. Our present bodies are as perishable as Adam's ('we bear the image of the man of dust'), but the future resurrection body will bear the image of Christ (v. 49). Neither here, nor in any of his other writings does Paul reveal what he thinks happened to the body of Jesus following his Resurrection.

**Gospel Luke 6:27-38**

Matthew's ‘*Sermon on the Mount*’ (Matthew Chapters 5 to 7) defined Christianity in terms of perfect righteousness in terms of a religion that is more personal and more demanding than that of official Judaism.

Luke (6:20-49) is concerned rather with emphasizing the heart of that message - love. It is around this theme of love that the elements of the central section of Luke's discourse are grouped: the duty of loving one's enemies (vv. 27-36), the obligations of fraternal charity (37-42). It seems that Luke is far less interested in defining the spirit of Christianity than in pointing out the conduct which can give concrete expression to that spi**rit.**

The inspiration behind Luke 6:27-36 is clear from the admonition 'Love your enemies' (v. 27a) - repeated in the conclusion (v. 35a). It is an instruction on the love of enemies, finely rounded off by v. 36.

The enemies are those who injure by thought (hate), word (curse), or deed (abuse); the Christian response is always agape, a love that manifests itself in action, as the context shows. The striking on the cheek is a calculated insult; Jesus is referring to insults suffered by his disciples precisely because they are disciples.

As Luke understands this saying, its message, couched in typical hyperbolic Semitic terms (v. 29), is that the most precious and most indispensable earthly things, such as honour and clothing, are nothing when balanced against the claims of agape.

Characteristically (v. 30), Luke adds 'everyone', and his reference to the 'taking away' and 'not asking back' stresses the generosity of love.

The saying ‘*Treat others as you would like them to treat you*’ (v. 31) is neither as original nor as profound as commonly imagined. The term "Golden Rule" was first used of it by Anglican theologians and preachers, Charles Gibbon and Thomas Jackson in 1604. But the principle of treating others as one wants to be treated is a maxim that is found in most religions and cultures. It can be considered an ethic of reciprocity in some religions, although different religions treat it differently. The maxim may appear as a positive or negative injunction governing conduct:

The earliest known example of the Golden Rule dates at least to the early Confucian times (550–480 B.C.) It can then be found in Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Taoism, and Zoroastrianism. But the fact that the rule can be found in any culture is not to say that it is dominant. In practice, Judaism, along with many others, rather went by the maxim “*Love your friends, hate your enemies*”

In Matthew’s version of this passage, Jesus mentions tax-collectors and Gentiles, both categories being alien to Jews. Luke however has a Gentile readership and has changed both into the more acceptable ‘sinners’ The ultimate motivation is God's merciful love (v. 36). Love must be universal and disinterested.

In Matthew 5:48 the command to be as perfect as the heavenly Father is somewhat intimidating; characteristically, in his version, Luke (v. 36) stresses the mercy of that Father. And he adds (v. 37) that we ought not to pass judgment on the motives or actions of others; and when we are injured by others, we ought to maintain a spirit of forgiveness.

There is an obvious anomaly at the end of the first paragraph, ‘............ lend without any hope of return. You will have a great reward ..........’ The whole of the last paragraph illustrates this principle. Compassion, condemnation, generosity, all will be reflected manyfold. Frankly, Christianity is in our own interests.

This apparent contradiction seems to run through much of Jesus' teaching, especially on forgiveness. The point must be that while God in Christ has initiated forgiveness toward us, we must continue to show forgiveness to others if we are to remain in his forgiveness. We should avoid any suggestion of a quid-pro-quo relationship between ethics and rewards.