

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Jun 20th 2017

As I read and reread today's scriptures, I kept tripping over the word "perfect". After too many blind alleys, I reminded myself not to "let perfect be the enemy of the good". Once I got past "perfect", I realized just how critical today's readings are to this moment in time in America and in our world

Jesus points out that our love for our family and fondness for our friends is not that special as that is what all human beings do. And that is not enough if we are going to be followers of Jesus. We need to strive to be perfect, "just as my Heavenly Father is perfect."

Yesterday's gospel identifies other ways to move towards perfection: giving people more than they ask for, going the extra mile and turning the other cheek. Today's readings talk about something much harder: loving our enemies. Wow! What a game changer that would be in today's world.

Enemies...who are my enemies? As one who has had the luxury of living in a relatively safe neighborhood and country for many years, I have not had to be fearful of others. While there are people I have worked with over the years that I could do without, I cannot think of anyone who would do me bodily harm. Not bad in the enemy category I thought.

Unfortunately, I only had to turn on the news to remind myself of how easily I dismiss people who hold different views on race or climate change along with other issues. It is very easy for me to label people who think differently on these issues as ignorant or mean or greedy. Labels help me deny their humanness and stop me from seeing them as a child of God. These labels prevent me from understanding why they believe something that runs so counter to my beliefs and values and make me deaf and blind to their fears and experiences. My less than perfect attitude widens the divide in our country, and among us around the world, and no one benefits from that.

In the first reading, St. Paul writes: "...to test the genuineness of your love by your concern for others." St. Paul probably wasn't talking our concern just for our family and friends. He was talking about something harder, something that will push me towards perfection.

These readings are tugging me to stop and breathe next time I am with someone who says something that runs contrary to my beliefs. I will then ask them why they think and feel that way. Maybe that person will be willing to have a conversation or maybe they won't. But I will have done something

that could start building a bridge over this huge divide in our country, and around the world. It will be a step towards the type of perfection Jesus is talking about in today's gospel.

Be perfect as Jesus is commanding us to be is going to be much harder than not making mistakes or getting everything just right. God's perfection will force us to be compassionate when we really don't want to or we don't think we can. My hope is that if we try hard enough, God's grace will help us do things we never thought we could.

This journey on the road to perfection will not be easy, but it is what our country and our world needs. It is also what Jesus is calling us to do. As you move along down this road, know I will be out there looking for you along the Way.

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