

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Feb 23rd 2013

Letting an enmity be will likely make it worse. Recrimination will increase. Old hurts will get bruised and new ones will be perpetrated. Grudges and resentments will fester. Violence and bloodshed may even happen. And all this will occur for the enemies facing one another from the two sides of a divide.

Dealing with the enmity requires both parties to turn their faces to one another and listen. Each needs to acknowledge to the other their own responsibility for the division, and to forgive the hurt and misunderstanding the other has caused -- more or less in that order. When all this takes root -- on both sides -- genuine reconciliation, which consists of deep down mutual forgiveness, becomes a real possibility. But sometimes it will occur only with the grace of God. If that is the case, then both sides will benefit from praying for the grace to reconcile.

For reconciliation to stick, the process needs to grow towards mutual love – which is more than mutual tolerance. Love, as reconciliation matures, will emerge not only in our words but especially in our deeds: publicly acknowledging (praising) the other's merit and worth, revering the other's dignity and goodness, helping the other to heal, working with the other to reconstruct your damaged relationship, and otherwise serving the other without grudge or resentment.

To come to a point of praising, revering, and serving an enemy one needs to experience the mutual forgiveness and healing which reconciliation makes possible. Then, as reconciliation flourishes, union of hearts and minds becomes a desired goal to work for, and the love that results will abide. When union and love are achieved, they become the doorway to peace, a deep and enduring peace, which is the polar opposite of enmity.

If what I have said here makes sense, then I think responding to these words of Christ from today's gospel will strike at the root of enmity: "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" (Mt 5:43-48).

This is the love that God wants to give grace for when we are experiencing enmity, the same love Our Lord gave words to from the cross: "Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

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