

7th Sunday in Ordinary Time

The story about David sparing the life of Saul is an illuminating illustration of what it means to love one's enemies.

Saul is hugely jealous of David because, beyond all expectations, David has proven himself in battle and become the darling of the people of Israel. Saul begins to see him as a rival and decides to hunt him down.

When David has the opportunity to take Saul's life, it's hardly because of his affection for him that he doesn't. There may have been some of that left over from when times between them were happier, but David gives the reason for his actions as being based on a reverence for God and what God has done: God anointed Saul as king and, as David saw it, that was irreversible.

As God's anointed, Saul enjoyed the status of being his ordained representative. Perhaps in view of the time that David himself would wear the crown—he had already been anointed as Saul's successor—David held that bringing harm to God's anointed would not go unpunished.

In all of this, emotional ties had very little to do with the decisions that were being taken.

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We make a mistake when we think of love of neighbor has having to do with affection and warm feelings. Jesus locates the motivation elsewhere. Love of our enemies is grounded in God's own concern for the world. Without a willingness to reject revenge, aggression, and retaliation, the world can never escape the vicious cycle of violence which is in direct opposition to the kingdom of God.

We have had in the lifetimes of many of us two prime examples of another way—one pursued by a non-Christian, Mahatma Gandhi, who admitted that, when it came to the practice of non-violence, Jesus of Nazareth was his guiding example, and another by Martin Luther King who, as a Christian, was overtly trying to follow the example of Jesus. For King, Jesus' teaching on love of one's enemies was not a theoretical idea, or a pious platitude, but something he practiced up to his dying moment.

Like Jesus, King preached from experience. Having been arrested nine times, stabbed and stoned, he continued to preach nonviolence as the only real way to move past the social conflicts that envelop us.

One expression of love of neighbor is, when you find yourself in conflict with someone, simply try to formulate in positive language what your opponent is

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trying to accomplish. That sort of forces us to balance out our perspective on the matter.

Jesus' concrete descriptions of ways to love the enemy explain the attitude and activities of the blessed ones who do not stop at weeping for others, but are willing to stand with those being treated unjustly to the point of being persecuted for it. They do that on account of the Son of Man.

For nearly 2000 years the Lord has addressed his disciples in the words of today's Gospel, "To you who hear I say, love your enemies." Obviously, not everyone has had ears to hear that. War and trying to get the upper hand seem like ready remedies to so many. Having been hurt and the harboring the predisposition to retaliate can make hearing difficult. But for those who have ears to hear, "love of the enemy" has the ring of God's truth to it: only this sort of love can redeem us and our world.

Loving our enemies is not easy, especially if we equate love with something we feel. But it is redemptive. Jesus has shown us that. It's the power that has held the world together since that day on the cross when he prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

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