

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Growing up with two older brothers wasn't always easy to do. They were always bigger and stronger than me. And like all siblings, we could get into disagreements and pick on each other until one of my parents intervened to make it stop. I will never forget my mom and my dad telling me to ignore Terry and Keith when they were picking on me. I also remember my parents telling me that just because my brothers pushed me around didn't mean that I had to hit back. I'll admit it was really hard to hear it, especially when my brothers were standing behind my parents making faces at me. All I wanted to do was to get even with my brothers.

When I read the gospel text for today, I couldn't help but think about the different situations with my brothers and others in my life where I wanted to get even, but happened to be guided away from retaliation. In the sermon on the plain in the gospel of Luke, Jesus told the audience that he was addressing during his lifetime and us to love our enemies.

Jesus challenges us to love our enemies by doing good to those who hate us, by blessing those who curse us, and to pray for those who abuse us. He further challenges us to offer our other cheek if someone hits the other one, and to give our shirt if someone takes our coat and to give to everyone who begs from us. And then Jesus ends with the Golden rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do to you."

At first glance or upon hearing this, I can imagine that we all say, yes, we can do this. We are called as saints to be nice to others even when they are mean to us. We are called to help those who ask us for help. We are challenged not to retaliate, but to offer the other cheek, if someone hits us.

I think on an intellectual level we all have the understanding of what Jesus is challenging us to do. However, knowing what Jesus asks us to do, and living it out in our lives are two very different things.

First we need to think about who are our enemies? Maybe it's someone who has hurt us by saying something that wasn't true or by sharing a secret. Maybe it's someone who abused someone physically, emotionally, mentally, or sexually. It might be someone with a different opinion. It may be someone who our country is at war with. And it might be that it's someone we may not think of right away. Whoever our enemies are, Jesus challenges us to love them.

Loving our enemies is one of the most difficult things for Christians to do. After all we are human and we have feelings. If someone hurts us we tend to be upset for a while, maybe even end a relationship because of the wound. Depending on how deep the wound, we may be bitter. We may not care about the other person. We may hope that only bad things happen to them. We may not pray for them.

I'll admit to that I struggle with this. If someone hurts me or my family it takes me a while to love that person. If someone would hit me, I don't know if I could offer the other cheek.

Loving our enemies is a process. There are times when we are caught up in our emotions and can't respond with kind words or gestures or even pray for the person who hurt us or has a different opinion than us.

The first step in loving our enemies is to pray for them and for ourselves. We should pray for God's presence among us and our enemies. We could ask God for our hearts to be open and for healing to occur between us and our enemies. We can ask God for guidance of what to do and say.

After praying, we might be able to do good things for our enemies and through that show God's love. For example, we might be able to talk with someone who has spread a rumor about us. Or we might invite the neighborhood bully to a party. Or we might learn how to live with someone we don't get along with very well.

Loving others who have hurt us or rejected us is a process. Jesus challenges us to treat others with love and respect...the same love and respect that we wish to be treated with.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding be in your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus the Lord. Amen.