

7A SML 2017  
MT 5:38-48

For the past several weeks, we have been reading the Sermon on the Mount, which one Catholic moral theologian calls a “charter for the Christian life.” The Sermon on the Mount begins with The Beatitudes, which are sometimes understood to be the preamble to the real “meat and potatoes” of the Sermon on the Mount, in that the Beatitudes speak to the multitudes, while the verses that follow speak to us:

From Blessed are “they” who yada yada yada, to “You” are the salt of the earth. “You” are the light of the world.

And once we are understood to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, Our Blessed Lord turns up the heat by delving into the real meaning of the Commandments:

- ✓ You have heard it said, You shall not kill, but what I say to you is this . . .
- ✓ You have heard it said, You shall not commit adultery, but what I say to you is this . . .

Our Lord also turns up the heat with His teaching on nonviolence, and loving one’s enemies, as found in this morning’s (evening’s) gospel.

“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.” (MT 5:43-44)  
 And by love, Jesus does not mean romantic love. Jesus means willing the good for the other – PERIOD; not being good to others so they will be good to us, but good to others for no other reason than to be good to others. It’s the old, “Do the right thing because it’s the right thing to do!” PERIOD!

Jesus turns up the heat a notch, wanting us to rise above the imperfect, yet benevolent forms of the “human M-O,” to God’s M-O, to love the way God loves. “For the sun rises on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust.” That’s why good things happen to bad people.

- ✓ God loves those who love Him and He loves those who do not love Him;
- ✓ He loves His friends and His enemies;
- ✓ He gives good things to those who deserve them and He gives good things to those who don’t deserve them.

And loving one’s enemies is the surest test of that kind of love.  
 Loving enemies is what makes saints!

With regard to loving our enemies, Our Blessed Lord turns up the heat some more as He turns His attention to the

practice of nonviolence. “You have heard that it was said, ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one to him as well.”

At first, it might seem as if Jesus’ instructions can sound like simply giving in, being a holy doormat if you will, as if there are only two responses to the enemy, to the playground bully: fight or flight, when in fact, Our Blessed Lord offers us a third.

“To the person who strikes you on one cheek, offer the other as well.”

- ✓ Is Our Blessed Lord’s boxing tip for the day is to block punches with your face?
- ✓ Like Rocky Balboa?
- ✓ Or in real life Rocky Marciano and Mike Tyson?

Perhaps some “out of the ring” examples might shed some light on His advice.

A story is told of Mother Teresa in the slums of Calcutta. She went with a small child to a local baker and begged for some bread for the hungry boy. The baker spat full in Mother Teresa’s face. Undaunted, she calmly replied, “That was for me. Do you have anything for the child?”

Desmond Tutu, when he was a young priest in Johannesburg was making his way along a wooden sidewalk, raised above the muddy street. He came to a narrow section of the walk and was met by a white man coming from the other direction. The man said to Tutu: “Get off the sidewalk. I don’t make way for gorillas.” Tutu stepped aside, gestured broadly, and responded, “But I do!”

And perhaps the most poignant example is our late Holy Father, St. John Paul. In June of 1979, the Holy Father came to Victory Square in the heart of Warsaw and offered the Mass in the presence of hundreds of thousands of people and the entire Polish Communist government. During his sermon, the pope spoke of God, of freedom, of human rights – all topics frowned upon by the Communist regime. As the Holy Father preached, the people chanted for 15 minutes, “We want God! We want God! We want God!” To which the Holy Father turned and gestured to the Communist officials as if to say, “Do you hear them?” but without speaking one word to them. From that moment, Communism, at least in Poland, was over. Within a few years, Communism fell in Poland and the Soviet Union, with barely a shot fired. And if someone had laid out that scenario in the early 70s, no one would have believed it.

In all three cases, the offended responded with neither fight nor flight, not blocking punches with their faces, but in a third, non-violent way, a way advised by Our Blessed Lord.