

BRINGING HOME THE GOSPEL

February 19, 2023 • 7th Sunday in Ordinary Time • Matthew 5:38-48

Be Perfect As Your Heavenly Father is Perfect

We find this reading from Matthew about a third of the way into Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Jesus begins his teaching with the Beatitudes at the beginning of chapter five and for the next three chapters reveals his "code of conduct." This gospel offers some quite difficult challenges. We are told not to seek revenge; to turn the other cheek, and to walk the extra mile. Then comes the most difficult challenge of all. We are told to love our enemies and be perfect as our heavenly father is perfect.

When Jesus tells us to love our enemies that doesn't mean we are expected to have warm, fuzzy feelings toward them. In fact, we don't even have to like them, seek them out, or sit down to dinner with them. We are expected, however, to love them as God loves them. This means respecting them, wishing them no evil, and even praying for them.

This teaching offers us a chance to remind our children that it is not wrong to be angry at someone. Anger is a feeling and, like all feelings, it is not sinful or wrong. It is what we do with those feeling that is important. It is our actions, angry words, and hurtful thoughts that get us into trouble. Teach your children to count to ten and say a prayer before walking away.

Jesus' second command, to "be perfect," sounds like an impossible challenge. How can we do this? The answer is hidden in the meaning of the word "perfect." The word comes from the Greek *teleios*, meaning complete or whole. Simply put, Jesus wants us to become the wonderfully unique people we were created to be—and it doesn't take long to realize we'll need lots of help.

It is a lifetime of work to figure out and develop our talents. In the same lifetime, we need to learn

which virtues come easily and which need more effort. On the journey of becoming our best selves, it doesn't take long to discover that without God's help, it is easy to get lost.

Only God is perfect. Only God is complete. However, if we are open to God's love, call on God's strength, and do our best to listen and live Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, one day we will get there. We will find our perfection; the person we were created to be, complete within the arms of the Divine.

FAMILY RESPONSE

Have each person share gifts or talents of the other family members. Talk about what makes each person unique. How can you use these gifts or your uniqueness to make the world a better place?

PERSONAL RESPONSE

Consider where you are in your own personal journey to become your best self. What do you need to do to further develop your unique combination of talents and gifts?