

Seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time

“But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father.”

Today’s Gospel has great beauty in that it offers a *lofty* ideal . . . we are to love one another. What a better place the world would be and what a better state my soul would be in if I could love everyone. But as I ponder on the Gospel’s demand to love, my German sense of justice kicks in . . . if people wouldn’t be so difficult, they might be more loveable. Why do they have to make it so hard! Its something we all have to contemplate. Could I be making it difficult for people to love me. To use some of the language from the Catholic SEARCH retreat, I need to remove some obstacles that make me a prickly pear instead of a warm fuzzy.

First, lets be willing to apologize when we are wrong or when we have been out of line. In the Our Father, which we pray at every Mass, do we ever ponder on the words, “*Forgive us our trespasses*”. Its means we owe a debt of gratitude to others. People are so good to us, and for this we should be always grateful. But sadly, we are often not as kind and considerate in return. I think people generally are generous of spirit and they would gladly overlook our faults, but they are waiting for the words “I’m sorry” so that they *can* forgive and love us again. Why are those words so hard to say? I remember a Christian Mother’s meeting at one of my former parishes, where the women were actually yelling at one another over a recipe for a dish they were making for a parish function. I finally had to intervene and remind them that we had the *Mothers* part down and we needed to work on the *Christian*! One lady was so upset by this that she stormed out of the room. Some hours later, when I was in my rectory, the doorbell rang; it was the lady who had stormed out of the meeting. She gruffly said, “Here’s some kuchen!” and then she left my doorstep. I guess it was her way of apologizing for being out of line, but she just couldn’t say “I’m sorry.” I know it’s a trivial (I enjoyed the kuchen!), but what about when we have offended our spouse, a child, a parent? We carry the hurt and anger for a lifetime and then the “I’m sorry” and sentiments of love that follow come near the time of death. A bit late . . . a lifetime was lost. If you tell Jesus that you are sorry and expect His mercy, then shouldn’t you do the same for the people He sends into your life?

A second obstacle to love is perhaps a sharp sense of humor. Don't get me wrong, a sense of humor is good . . . it brings joy into people's lives; it lifts the heaviness of life; and it diffuses tense situations. But I find that in our day, humor has a bit of sarcasm to it; it cuts people down rather than heal them and it makes love difficult. As a priest, I see people engaging in what they believe is humor but here's what's funny (no pun intended) . . . the people around them aren't laughing. For example, rather than offer the common polite niceties and greetings that are spoken when you meet someone, why is the first thing to come out of the mouth a snide remark or a putdown? I see people tensing up when they meet such people because the only way to deflect a barb is to give one back. Or families tell embarrassing things about one another and believe they are funny . . . "He would kill me if he knew I told you this" . . .and in hushed tones they proceed to tell an embarrassing story about a family member. If you know they would be embarrassed by this then keep it to yourself. Or why does it have to be little jokes at the others expense, the Rodney Dangerfield approach, "My wife's cooking is so bad . . ." followed by the putdowns. I like the advice of Mother Angelica, " If your husband makes a wise crack about how you make breakfast, take the contents of the skillet and pour it over his head!" We should know that sarcasm comes from Greek words that mean the "tearing of flesh". When we tear others apart with sarcastic humor, we tear apart loving relationships, the casualty of sarcasm.

Every day when we come before the Lord in prayer, we have two sides of a coin, you might say. First, we beg, "Jesus, help me to love", which He demands of us. On the other side of the coin, we beg, "Jesus, remove those obstacles in my life which make me difficult to love." The Cross of Jesus reminds us that true love is sacrificial. Be willing to sacrifice anything in your life that threatens the radiant light and beauty of love.