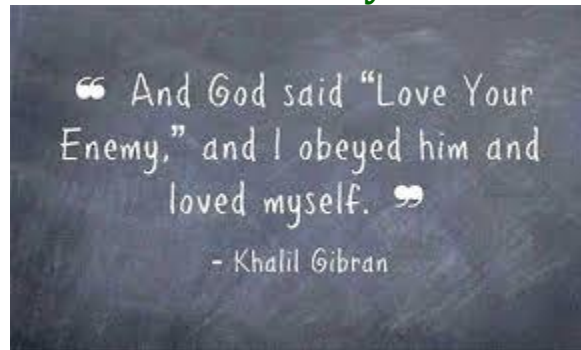


ctkAlive! Scripture Study
7th Sunday in Ordinary Time
2023—A Cycle



What do I see?

"And God said, 'Love Your Enemy;' I obeyed him and loved myself."

What does this quote from [Khalil Gibran](#) say to me about loving "my own" greatest enemy?

Image source: [Unsplash.com](https://unsplash.com)

Opening Prayer

(adapted, edited and abridged for use here)

A Prayer for Loving My Enemies

Jesus, Suffering Servant,
you experienced the worst human beings had to offer,
yet you offered love and forgiveness to your enemies.
Help me to love and forgive the difficult...
hardly lovable people in my life.
Help me to be slow to anger... and patient.
Help me not to return evil with evil, insult with insult,
but to do good for those who are tough to be around.
And over time, transform my negative feelings towards
___(names)___ and desire what's best for *them*.
Amen.

Source: [ReclaimToday.org](https://reclaimtoday.org)

Scripture Readings

Leviticus 19: 1-2, 17-18 "You shall not bear hatred in your heart for a brother or sister."

Psalms 103: 1-4, 8, 10, 12-13 "The Lord pardons all your iniquities, heals all your ills."

I Corinthians 3: 16-23 "Do you not know that you are the temple of God?"

Matthew 5: 38-48 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, ‘Love your enemies.’”

Introduction to the 7th Sunday of Ordinary Time

As we continue our reflection on the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5: 38-48), the hyphenated compound words “topsy-turvy” come to mind. We all have an idea what that means—*upside down*. Upending and making right what seems the desired opposite of our societal logic. This weekend, Jesus asks us to search deep in our hearts and take a fresh look at what he asks us to believe about the right way to shape our minds and live our lives. We grapple with the Beatitudes and their upside-down ethics and virtues (“Blessed are... *not* the folks who seem to have it all... the security of good-paying jobs, living in safe neighborhoods, good kids and good schools. Add your own list.)

How do we in prosperous western societies deal with Jesus’ ode to true wisdom? Easy. We either ignore it... or spend our days distorting it into a size and shape of our own making. This weekend we hear more Beatitude-like concepts coming from Jesus. His expanded view of “wealth” challenges us to reexamine our preferred way of living a Christian life. For example, Jesus demands that we “love our enemy” and “do good to those who hate us....”

Nature calls us to love within our familial and chosen groups. The Hebrew Scriptures spoke of loving a neighbor, but this was a matter of solidarity among God’s people, those who lived and cherished the Law of Moses. Jesus gave “love” a much broader meaning, drawing us into a different world of topsy-turvy, upside-down values and ways of loving.

[For a deeper plunge into this gospel, read Carondelet Sr. Mary McGlone’s commentary in the [National Catholic Reporter](#).]

A Reading from the Book of Leviticus (19: 1-2, 17-18)

“The Lord spoke to Moses: “Speak to the whole congregation of the Israelites and tell them, ‘You must be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.’

“You must not hate your brother in your heart. You must surely reprove your fellow citizen so that you do not incur sin on account of him. You must not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the children of your people, but you must love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.”

Personal Reflection

This book is also called “Numbers,” because it begins and ends with a census of the Israelites. Many readers find this book frustrating because it ignores what is historically plausible. Likewise, many pages devoted to the laws and customs of Israel appear dry and dated. Therefore, it helps us if we understand that Leviticus superimposes two histories. On one hand, it deals with ancient Jewish traditions of the time. Then, it retells the Exodus story in a slightly different form.

“You must not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the children of your people, but you must love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.”

— *Is this passage from Leviticus the same teaching Jesus gave to the crowds listening to him (see the gospel text below)? If it's not, how do the two teachings differ?*

Responsorial: Psalm 103 (1-4, 8, 10, 12-13)

A psalm in praise of God's love.

The Lord is kind and merciful.

Praise the Lord, O my soul!
With all that is within me, praise his holy name!
Praise the Lord, O my soul!
Do not forget all his kind deeds!
The Lord is kind and merciful.

He is the one who forgives all your sins,
who heals all your diseases,
who delivers your life from the Pit,
who crowns you with his loyal love and compassion.
The Lord is kind and merciful.

The Lord is compassionate and merciful;
he is patient and demonstrates great loyal love.
He does not deal with us as our sins deserve;
he does not repay us as our misdeeds deserve.
The Lord is kind and merciful.

As far as the eastern horizon is from the west,
so he removes the guilt of our rebellious actions from us.
As a father has compassion on his children,
so the Lord has compassion on his faithful followers.
The Lord is kind and merciful.

Personal Reflection

Post-exilic Jews lived in deep gratitude for Yahweh's mercy in bringing them home after decades of slavery and their long journey home through desert drought and other hardships. This psalm reminds both Jews and Christians to live in the joyful paradox that our God is higher than the heavens, yet so close to us. As we pray Psalm 103, we see how post-Exodus people expressed their praise for Yahweh's love and mercy.

As Christians, we have the added advantage of knowing God loves us so much that Divinity took human flesh in Jesus. He taught us *in his human-divine person* how to live a godly life. Yes, we believe that God came to us, spoke to us, taught us, and died for us in Jesus of Nazareth. He brought with him his (and our) Father's unending mercy,

exemplified by St. Luke in a very human family—like ours—in what we call the Parable of the Prodigal Son (15: 11-32).

At the end of Jesus human life, while nailed to a cross, he prayed not for himself but for each of us—individually—“Father ... forgive them....” Jesus’ three-decade life among us demonstrated day by day the bottomless depth of divine love, mercy, and forgiveness.

— Which sentence or phrase from this psalm leaps out and says to me, “Pay attention, (my name), this is God’s special word for you... today”?

“He does not deal with us as our sins deserve; he does not repay us as our misdeeds deserve.”

— What consolation does this psalm verse bring to my heart today?

— What is my belief about Afterlife? Does everyone enjoy eternal life with God? Or do some souls transfer into a state of eternal darkness, with “weeping and gnashing of teeth? Either way, how did I arrive at my answer?

A Reading from St. Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians (3: 16-23)

“Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you? If someone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, which is what you are.

“Guard against self-deception, each of you. If someone among you thinks he is wise in this age, let him become foolish so that he can become wise. For the wisdom of this age is foolishness with God. As it is written, ‘*He catches the wise in their craftiness.*’ And again, ‘*The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.*’

“So then, no more boasting about mere mortals! For everything belongs to you, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future. Everything belongs to you, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.”

Personal Reflection

Christ is the new Temple that takes the place of the temple of the Jews (John 2: 19 and Mark 15: 38). God’s Temple is Christ because in him abides the whole of divine Mystery. Likewise the Christian Church is God’s temple, because in and through her the Holy Spirit works in many visible and invisible ways. The Temple of God abides in every Christian home and in the heart of each believer (see verse 19 in chapter 6 of I Corinthians), because the Spirit lives in each one of them.

“Do you not know that you are God’s temple?”

— What does it mean to me that I am God’s temple on earth? What one thing might I do today to improve the quality my “templeness”?

The Gospel According to Matthew (5: 38-48)

"You have heard that it was said, '*An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.*' But I say to you, do not resist the evildoer. Whoever strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other to him as well.

"And if someone wants to sue you and to take your tunic, give him your coat also. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to the one who asks you, and do not reject the one who wants to borrow from you.

"You have heard it said, '*Love your neighbor*' and '*hate your enemy*' [v. 43]. But I say to you, love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you, so you may be like your Father in heaven, since he causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Even the tax collectors do the same, don't they? And if you only greet your brothers, what more do you do? Even the Gentiles do the same, don't they?

"So then, be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Personal Reflection

"An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." In Jesus' time on earth, Jewish people considered it fair to take back what someone took from them, as stated in Deuteronomy 19: 18-21: "The judges will thoroughly investigate the matter, and if the witness should prove to be false and to have given false testimony against the accused, you must do to him what he had intended to do to the accused. In this way you will purge evil from among you. The rest of the people will hear and become afraid to keep doing such evil among you. You must not show pity; the principle will be a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a hand for a hand, and a foot for a foot."

This Hebrew maxim aimed to limit the thirst for excessive vengeance. And it served as a reminder for judges and communities to condemn those who abused the weak.

Jesus taught us to approach an adversary in a manner we can only call "countercultural." "Offer the other cheek" meant to break the web of violence. Jesus stressed the need for us to see the goodness and mercy of God at work in our daily lives... in our treatment of others.

"So then, be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

— *Since I can never attain the full perfection of God, how do I apply this teaching to my own real-life circumstances?*

— *Suppose I were listening in person to Jesus' teaching on forgiveness, would I have gone away thinking, "He asks the impossible. I can't live that kind of life"? Or, knowing myself as I am today, would I return home with the intention to do my very best to live the kind of life he mapped out for me at birth? Considering my divine call to holiness, what score (A, B, C, D, F) would I give myself today. How satisfied am I with my honest report card?*

For Inspirational Listening and Watching

Watch

Gospel Reflection for the 7th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Cycle A) by [John Michael Talbot](#) (2 min)

(We keep returning to JMT, because he can say in 2 minutes what other homilists take 10-15 minutes to say... and often with less passion and enthusiasm.)

Listen

"The Lord is Kind and Merciful" (based on Psalm 103), composed by [Tony Alonso](#) and sung by [Jeanne Cotter](#)

Read

Jesus' Alternative Plan: The Sermon on the Mount by Richard Rohr, OFM (Franciscan)
[This updated edition of the author's Jesus' Plan for a New World will inspire Christians desiring a transformative understanding of Jesus' teachings and seeking the true heart of their faith.]

Journaling Prompts

Based on this weekend's Scripture readings, what does Jesus ask me to do TODAY regarding...

(1) the quality of the love I bring to my personal relationships...
and

(2) my life as an emissary of Christ, committed to bringing God's love to the people with whom I interact in person and on social media?

*Who needs to receive from me this week a moment of laughter and personal concern?
Why do I hesitate?*

In light of this weekend's Scriptures, take some time to write about events occurring in your life this week and what you see happening in the world.

Preview of Next Weekend's Scriptures

1st Sunday of Lent

Genesis 2: 7-9 and 3: 1-7 "God formed man out of the clay of the ground."

Psalm 51: 3-6, 12-13, 17 "A clean heart create for me, O God...."

Romans 5: 12-19 "Through one man, sin entered the world."

Matthew 4: 1-11 "Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert...."

Closing Prayer

(adapted, edited and abridged for use here)

When I Have Difficulty Loving My Enemies

O God, lover of peace, and preserver of charity,
grant to my enemies the gifts of peace and true love.

Infuse your love into my heart...

that no soul-wounding temptation

may ever change the course of my life.

In particular, look graciously upon ____(*name*)____
and grant them health of mind and body,
that they—and I—may love you with all our strength.
Amen.

Source: Aleteia.org adapted prayer from the 19th-century book, [*The Key of Heaven*](#).

***Note:** Some internet links endure online, others come and go. If a link fails, the owner of the site may have taken it down.*

***Gender usage in these reflections:** We are conscious of gender references to God in the Scripture texts. Often, attempts to rewrite these passages result in awkward sentence structures. We have left the biblical translations as they are but do our best to be inclusive in all other parts of the reflection.*

The Sunday readings are from the New English Translation (NET)
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