

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time: The Christian and Hatred

A big fight broke out in a school yard between two nine year old boys, third graders. Teachers quickly broke up the fight. "Who started this?" one teacher asked. "He did," said one of the boys, sobbing. "It all started when he hit me back."

It is always the other guy's fault. There has not been a war started in the last one hundred years that has not been the other guy's fault. Hitler was a master at justifying his invasions of Alsace Lorraine, Czechoslovakia, Poland, etc. Arabs have blamed Israelis and Israelis have blamed Arabs for every policy of aggression each side has adopted. Catholics and Protestants have done the same thing in Northern Ireland. Right now Russia is proclaiming that Russians in the Ukraine are being abused to give them a justification for invasion. Some would like to think that the United States has never been an unjustified aggressor, but the Mexican War, and the Spanish American War are just two sad examples of how our country manipulated facts to achieve its political purposes.

God does not judge our actions in relationship to whether it is someone else's fault. He is more concerned that we do what is correct regardless of whatever grudge we could have. A good example of this is in the first reading for today. This is part of the history of David and Saul. The *First Book of Samuel* tells the story. The prophet Samuel had anointed the young boy David claiming him for God. After this, as you know, David slew Goliath and became famous. Soon after posing for Michelangelo, David was made a commander in King Saul's army. David was so successful that Saul eventually became jealous of him. On one triumphant return to Jerusalem, the women cried out, "Saul has slain his thousands and David has slain his tens of thousands." Not a politically advisable thing for the girls to be shouting. Saul decided that David had to go. He was quite shrewd. He saw how his daughter Michal was looking at young David. She must have seen the statue. Anyway, he knew David could not afford to offer the traditional gifts to a king for marriage to a princess. So he figured he could get rid of David by giving him a task that would result in his death. Saul offered his daughter Michal to David in marriage, but first David had to kill a hundred Philistines. (Actually, he was told to present Saul with the Hebrew equivalent of scalps, but this is the PG version of the story so we will not go into that.) Anyway, David showed up with proof that he had killed two hundred Philistines, and was allowed to marry Michal.

King Saul was even angrier. This upstart was now his son-in-law. One day after dinner Saul and his court were relaxing. David was present playing music. It must have been rap or something because it pushed Saul over the edge. He grabbed a spear and chucked it at David. David ducked just in time and headed for the hills. Saul declared that David was a rebel and went out with his army out to catch him. This is when we come upon today's first reading. David and Abishai learned where Saul's army was camped for the night. They snuck into the camp and into the King's tent. Instead of killing Saul and getting rid of his problem, David took proof that he had been there, Saul's spear and water jug. He then called out to Saul and his army from a nearby hill. He basically said, "I have plenty of reason to kill you, and it would have

been simple for me to do so, but it would have been the wrong thing for me to do since you have been chosen by God to be king."

One message of the reading is that an action we take cannot be justified by saying, "It's the other guy's fault." We have to consider the total impact of the action as well as account for our uncanny ability to rationalize our way into justifying anything that we do.

First, we have to be honest, here. Just like the kid in the fight, we can always find ways to deflect the blame on others. Every wife abuser claims that his spouse drove him to it. Every child beater claims that the child would not behave properly. Every person holding a grudge is convinced that they had no part in the actions that led to the hostility. We are adept at justifying our behavior, no matter how absurd that behavior might be.

Today's Gospel speaks about the impact of our actions of love or hate. The Lord asks us to do that which seems intolerable. He wants us to love our enemies, "Do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. To the person who strikes you on one cheek, offer the other one as well, and from the person who takes your cloak, do not withhold even your tunic. Give to everyone who asks of you, and from the one who takes what is yours do not demand it back." What can possibly justify such radical charity, radical love, that refuses to respond to injury? Jesus gives the justification: "Then your reward will be great and you will be children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked." The motive for the Lord's decree is stated clearly: We are to be merciful, just as our Father is merciful.

The Christian is called to bring an experience of God to the world. The Christian is called to proclaim salvation. The Christian is called to proclaim Jesus Christ. But how can we proclaim God if we behave in a manner that is a total antithesis to God? God is Love. How can we proclaim God if we hate? The mission the Lord has sent us on is far more important than the question of who started the fight. By refusing to respond to injury, we alert the world to a new attitude in life. From the cross, Jesus forgave all who participated in his torture and death. From his cell, St. Thomas More, forgave King Henry VIII for destroying his reputation and his life. From our hearts, we have to forgive anyone who has hurt us. The vicious cycle of hatred can only be stopped by people who are determined to love.

All of us have our battle stories. All of us have been done dirty by others. Perhaps, some of us have let bad situations become worse by taking a shot back against those unjust aggressors in our lives. Of course, nothing was resolved. More than that, the world suffered because we did not take advantage of the opportunity to bring God's love and mercy to the world.

Some of us are at the end of the road of life. How many of us really expect to be alive in twenty years, thirty years, forty years? How important is that grudge we

hold? The only thing we can take with us when we die is our capacity to love. Do we really want to diminish or destroy our capacity to love to get back at that other person?

It is a great gift the Lord gives us when he points out that the way to happiness is by rejecting hatred. The only one ever destroyed by hatred is the person who does the hating. Vengeance is a poison we pour for someone else, then drink ourselves. Those who find peace in their lives are those who are tied to God, that's what the word religion means-- being tied to God. The only ones who find peace in their lives are those who are so tied to God that others experience God's presence through them. *Be merciful just as your Father is merciful* is our guide to living the life of Christ in this world and being fully united to Him in the next life.