

**HOMILY DELIVERED FEBRUARY 20, 2022**  
**THE SEVENTH (7<sup>TH</sup>) SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**  
**YEAR C**

Huckleberry Finn said, “It ain’t the parts of the Bible I don’t understand that bother me. It’s the parts I do understand.”

All three of our narrative readings and the psalm are ones we understand. So, if we have any Huck Finn in us at all, take the Scriptures seriously at all, believe the Scriptures are divinely inspired at all, take Jesus at his word at all, then something heard today is going to bother us. And most bothersome is the Gospel text (Lk 6:27-38). Luke presents these teachings of Jesus baldly, suggesting that these sayings are not up for debate or a vote, are not suggestions or an ideal, instead that they are *commands*, and we recognize them as such. “Love your 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, neither defend yourself nor retreat, give him a chance to strike you again. And from the person who takes your hat and gloves, see if she needs your coat as well. Give to everyone who asks of you, and don’t ask for things to be returned – the lawn mower or even large sums of money” (Lk 6:27-30).

People don’t like being told what to do. And we really have a problem with being told not to stand up for ourselves or not to answer back. In many situations, doesn’t justice require a response? Take the very ugly though far too common, violent example of domestic abuse: if a man hits a woman (a wife, a fiancée, a girlfriend), the very last thing the woman should do is stick around to be beaten again. (If a man hits a woman, she should leave him – fast – because if he does it once, he will do it again.) You see, it is quite easy to come up with countless scenarios for good and necessary exceptions to the stark demands of the Lord’s teachings. After all, the human being has a natural survival instinct that extends beyond the body to the instruments

contributing to survival: food, clothing, and shelter – our property and resources. And we have to heed our survival instinct. Too, everyone is also commanded by God to love oneself (though) in a supernatural way.

It is this last, namely the supernatural Spirit at work in us, that gives basis and thrust to the commands Jesus spoke. The sayings we heard have a supernatural character; they are possible only if and when the acting person has been given grace, only if and when the acting person is cooperating with, and living in, grace.

In the natural order, and even through much of the religious history of the ancient Israelites, hatred of evil persons is assumed to be right and just. However, disciples of Christ are no longer slaves to their natural tendencies: are not to think or act or judge on the basis of feelings or emotions. Instead, Christians are to “bear the image of the heavenly one” (1 Cor 15:49). And bearing that spiritual, supernatural character, we think and act and judge more dispassionately, more reasonably and most humbly.

You recall from the first reading, the (what we might call) *natural* or *earthly* man, Abishai, whispers to David, “Your enemy, Saul, is delivered into your hands. Let me kill him with a thrust of my sword; my feelings are so strong that I can kill him with one strike” (1 Sm 26:8). But the (what we might call) *supernatural*, the *spiritual*, man, David – the man from whose line Jesus the Messiah will come – David says, “Do not harm him, for who can lay a hand on the Lord’s anointed and remain innocent?” (1 Sm 26:9). David is thinking and acting and judging in the (Holy) Spirit of the gospel teachings of Jesus. David did good to the man who hated him, sparing Saul’s life; he let Saul live to fight another day, gave the King another chance to kill him.

When people think or act or judge based on their feelings or emotions, they act out of their natural, fallen nature. Jesus said, “But it shall not be so among you” (Mk 10:43). To those who

hate us, to those who mistreat us, to those who cheat us: we are to show them Christ, who – at his own trial – remained silent in the face of his false accusers (Mk 14:61). The answer to evil is not to answer it all; do not lower yourself to your basest nature, but be uplifted, rise up, allow grace to elevate your nature. For in the supernatural realm, the spiritual life, “Love bears all things ... endures all things” (1 Cor 13:7).

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