

Well if you want concrete evidence that our Lord Jesus isn't some superficial, politically correct politician who shamefully panders to the crowds for the sake of popular approval, then look no further than today's Gospel passage. Jesus' teachings would've certainly been controversial at the time—especially since Jesus' first century Jewish audience is living under brutal Roman occupation and so any talk of “loving one's enemies” would've been shocking to many.

Ultimately, one could label today's Gospel the “Manifesto of mercy.” In fact, mercy is at the heart of the Gospel. “Mercy,” properly understood, as the willingness to forgive the sins of another and the willingness to embrace and help another who is in need and weaker than us, is *exactly* who our Lord Jesus Christ is—*He is Mercy Incarnate!*

Moreover, the beauty of our Lord's teaching today, which comes from His Sacred Heart, is its forceful clarity. So what I'd like to do in this homily is reflect on some of the main exhortations in Jesus' teachings, briefly flesh them out, and use them as an examination of conscience. So let's delve deeper into the powerful words of our Lord

and Savior and as we reflect on the meaning of Jesus' words, let's examine our own conscience.

First, "love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you...love your enemies and do good to them." In 2019, when our nation is so bitterly divided and we have many people who actually hate each other over partisan politics, these are much-needed words. Even outside the exhausting realm of politics, this teaching is so powerful and necessary.

Do I have any enemies in my life? Who hates us or greatly dislikes us? Do I hate anyone in my life: in my family or at work? If so why? Do I truly *love* my enemies? In other words, do I strive to love those in my life who don't love me? And by that I mean do I seek the authentic good for my enemies: spiritually, physically, emotionally, etc. Do I pray for my enemies and do I truly seek their holiness, happiness, and salvation? Or am I consumed with hatred for others because of partisan politics, jealousy, work, family disputes, past hurts, etc.?

Secondly, our Lord Jesus says, "Give to everyone who asks of you,

and from the one who takes what is yours do not demand it back... Give, and gifts will be given to you.” Am I generous to others out of mercy and compassion? Or am I stingy with what God has given me? Do I refuse to share my resources with the poor and those who are suffering and most in need?

Third, we hear the famous “Golden Rule”: “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” Call me naïve, but I’m seriously convinced that if every human being on planet Earth lived by this Heavenly rule on a daily basis, we would have a much more peaceful, loving, compassionate, and humane world. I feel like we really need to flesh the Golden Rule out to truly understand and appreciate it.

“Do to others as you would have them do to you.” In other words, as human beings, we naturally want to be loved and accepted—therefore we should love and accept others as beloved children of God. We naturally want be treated with dignity, respect, and compassion—therefore we should treat others with dignity, respect, and compassion. We naturally desire mercy and justice for ourselves—therefore we

should be just and merciful with others. This simple, yet powerful principle is truly the formula for a more peaceful and loving society.

Fourth, Our Lord Jesus commands us, “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” This is similar to what Jesus says in the Gospel of Matthew: “Be perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect.” To be merciful is to share in *God’s own divine nature*—to share in *His divine perfection*. God is infinite Mercy itself and *so to be merciful is to truly be divine*. We should not restrict our notion of “divinity” to cosmic power—rather, “divinity” is synonymous with mercy. Brothers and sisters, many times we can be so quick to demand God’s mercy for ourselves and yet so quick to deny God’s mercy to others.

So Jesus tells us, “Forgive and you will be forgiven.” In other words, if we refuse to forgive others, our Heavenly Father will not forgive us! How can we demand mercy for ourselves and yet deny mercy to others? So who do we need to forgive in our life? Who do we need to be more merciful towards in our life? Is it a spouse, a parent, a son or daughter, a relative, a friend, a co-worker? Are we stubbornly holding on to any grudges against another person? Are we refusing to

let go of past hurts and wounds, whether large or small, real or perceived? Are we being petty and childish in our grudge-holding? Do I need the Lord to heal certain wounds so that I can forgive? Brothers and sisters, always remember that forgiveness leads to freedom. The Lord Jesus doesn't want us to be slaves to grudges, bitterness, and resentment. He wants us to be free and to be merciful as He is merciful.

Lastly, our Lord Jesus teaches, "Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned." Just to clarify, since these words have been distorted to justify sinfulness and selfishness, our Lord and Savior is *in no way* endorsing moral relativism. Christ is *not* saying that we should not judge the morality of human behavior. No, Jesus is *not* saying "Go and do whatever you want, do whatever makes you feel good, whatever makes you happy, even if it's sinful and destructive."

No, what our Lord Jesus *is saying* is that we shouldn't judge the eternal souls of others! Only God is the eternal Judge who knows the human heart in an absolutely perfect way. When Jesus commands us to stop judging, He means what He says in the very next sentence: stop

condemning! In other words, stop writing people off and dismissing them as irredeemable! Stop treating others as if God can't save them! Stop treating others as if they can't change—as if they can't be forgiven and experience a grace-filled conversion of heart and mind!

Our Lord Jesus Christ died to save every single person and so He desires the eternal salvation of every single person! Our merciful Savior invites *every* person, without exception, into an intimate relationship with Him in and through His Church. *Every* person is loved by God and gracefully invited to repentance and therefore *every person* is capable of change. At times, we can be so quick to judge, condemn, and criticize others. Rather, as disciples of Christ, we should be quick to listen to, love, and serve others by trying to help them on the path to holiness.

Brothers and sisters, as we prepare to worship and receive Mercy Itself, our Lord Jesus Christ, in the Most Holy Eucharist, let us pray: Lord, you never command us to do the impossible. But with your grace, all things are possible. Give me the grace to do what may be hard Lord. Give me the grace to be merciful as you are merciful and to forgive as You forgive, especially my those whom I struggle to love. Amen.