

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

February 20, 2022

Reflection by Sister Belinda Monahan, OSB

1 Samuel 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23; Psalm 103:1-2, 3-4, 8, 10, 12-13; 1 Corinthians 15:45-49; Luke 6:27-38

When I looked at today's readings, I admit, I really hoped for a way out of reflecting on today's Gospel. So, I looked at the first reading—no luck there, it points pretty much directly back to the Gospel. Even the second reading seemed tied much more closely to the Gospel than usual. I felt stuck. Then I began to wonder why it is that today's Gospel seems like such a challenge: to reflect on and, probably more to the point, to live out.

Today's Gospel follows immediately upon last Sunday's Gospel, in which we heard the beatitudes; those lovely statements that we hold at the center of our faith. The teachings in today's Gospel flow directly from those beatitudes. So why does today's Gospel seem to demand so much from us? What is Jesus really asking us to do? And why does it seem so impossible?

My frustration with the Gospel begins with Jesus' first injunction "Love your enemies," I don't have any enemies, I mentally announce: Very few, if any of us here, would claim to have enemies—certainly no one who wants to kill us as Saul wants to kill David in the first reading. Does this mean we can just skip this section? If I keep reading though, my brain gets snagged on the fourth injunction, "pray for those who mistreat you." Even mistreat might be a bit strong, but how often throughout the course of a day do I run into people or occasions where I find myself

wondering “What are they doing? Why are they being so thoughtless?” Is Jesus telling me I have to pray for the owner of the car who parks so close to the driveway that it’s hard to make that left turn every morning?

Well, yes. Jesus isn’t telling us that we have to *like* that person, but he is setting out a very clear way of thinking about and acting toward that person. In his commentary on the Gospel, Luke Timothy Johnson reminds us that Jesus uses love as a verb: “an attitude and a mode of action rather than an emotion. It means to will the good for another.” The rest of the Gospel outlines that mode of action in very concrete ways.

In the first reading, David spares Saul’s life, even though Saul is trying to kill him. He spares Saul’s life because he recognizes Saul as the Lord’s anointed. The second reading, reminds us pointedly that we bear the image of the heavenly being—and this seems to be an all-inclusive we: not just we as individuals, but we as all of humanity. *All* of us are God’s anointed. So Jesus’ injunctions refer to everyone. They remind us that—to borrow from Luke Timothy Johnson again—that reciprocity, doing what is required, is no longer enough. We must go beyond that.

In the midst of chewing on all of this I came across a reflection by Joan Chittester, in the National Catholic Reporter. It’s about the beatitudes, but it spoke to me about today’s Gospel as well.

The Beatitudes are verbs. They set out to do things. They change us and everything around us. In fact, to be real at all, they require a very public

demonstration of very important dimensions of life. The Beatitudes of Jesus change the very core of life. Jesus did not preach the Beatitudes as lulling examples of soft poetry, though poetry they are. They are within us, the steel spine of life.

So today's Gospel *is* challenging. It challenges us to an active form of love. To love as Jesus loved us. Not because God *will* give us a fair measure in return—despite the future tense of the verbs in the last section of the Gospel—but because God already *has* given us—not in fair measure, but an overabundance of mercy.