



## BENEDICTINE SISTERS OF CHICAGO

Reflections for 7th Sunday in Ordinary Time  
February 23, 2025  
Sr. Virginia Jung

1 Samuel 26: 7-9, 12-13, 22-23  
1 Corinthians 15: 45-49  
Luke 6: 27-38

The readings today call us to the practice of non-violence, which is a mind set, a discipline, and a way of walking in the world that has deep roots for us in the life of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, as Christian individuals, Christian leaders, and Christian nations, we have often, maybe mostly, refused to embrace non-violence. Perhaps that is why Jesus begins by saying “To you who hear, I say, love your enemies....,” knowing that many are unable to hear this amplification of the command to love. Saint Benedict, who begins his Rule with similar words “Listen with the ear of your heart...” repeatedly emphasizes the lessons of this gospel in the Rule. As Benedictine listeners, as 21st century American listeners, it has a lot to say to us.

While not a practitioner of non-violence overall in his life, David did practice it with Saul, who was, in fact trying to kill David, which meets most people’s criteria for enemy. The story we heard today is the second time David had Saul at his mercy and chose to spare his life. The other time, if you recall, was in a cave, where Saul was again, sleeping and David cut a swath from his cloak as proof he had been there and spared Saul’s life. David did this in response to his call from God; he respected and revered Saul as king, the anointed of God. And he related to him with mercy, an important quality of the king and an essential characteristic of our God. If the word non-violence rubs you the wrong way, maybe the concept of mercy is a better path in for you into the heart of God and to use as a walking stick, a support along the paths of the world.

As I read the annotations in the Bible regarding the first reading from the book of Samuel, I was startled to learn that it is one of the readings used in the Mass for Our Oppressors. I thought, “There’s a Mass for Our Oppressors??” Later, I read that the first verses of today’s gospel form the entrance antiphon in the Mass for Our Oppressors. So I went to the sacristy to consult the Roman Missal and indeed, there is such a mass. You see, it is a thick book, with masses for many different situations and occasions. I really wonder, when and where has this mass been used? What is it like to participate in it, to gather and offer the Eucharist for an oppressor?

The Eucharist is a celebration of Christian non-violence at work and a model for our own response to life and all that it brings us. It is an invitation to radical hospitality, which is perhaps another name for non-violence and for mercy. The short second reading today is part of a longer treatise on the paschal mystery, emphasizing the interconnection of the death, burial, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, all working together for our salvation. Our understanding of where we come from, where we are headed, and the transformation that implies, the faith that

this is so, is foundational in our capacity to both accept God's mercy and to offer mercy to our neighbor - friend or foe.

This gospel is a portion of the teaching that Jesus gave his followers –a talk known as the Sermon on the Plain in Luke and the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew. In both lessons, the evangelists record Jesus' amplification of the command to love, extending love from neighbor to enemy. I imagine the people's shock; that they would have felt Jesus was asking a lot. He was, but he is not asking anything of us that God doesn't already do for us. And yet, we often resist this teaching. A difference in the Sermon on the Plain is the beautiful, exuberant image of all good being poured into your lap, a metaphor of abundant life and the effect that love has in the world. Also, that metaphor of the generosity of God is a model for us for how to be in the world.

So naturally, in writing his Rule for monasteries, which he calls "schools for the Lord's service," Saint Benedict references this gospel model. He cites it several times in Chapter 4, *The Tools of Good Works – to love your enemies, if people curse you, do not curse them back but bless them instead, never do to another what you do not want done to yourself.* Those are all good suggestions for the community, the family, the workplace, and the nation. Saint Benedict also refers to this gospel in Chapter 7 on Humility. He writes, *In truth, those who are patient amid hardships and unjust treatment are fulfilling the Lord's command: When struck on one cheek, they turn the other; when deprived of their coat, they offer their cloak also; when pressed into service for one mile, they go two.* Notice that it is the attitude of humility, not self abasement, that makes that response holy. Again in chapter 61 the Reception of Visiting Monks, he repeats, *Never do to another what you do not want done to yourself.* And, in Chapter 70 Presumption of Striking Another at Will –again, the rational Saint Benedict gives for non-violence is Jesus' teaching – *Never do to another what you do not want done to yourself.* He repeatedly reminds us that we are brothers and sisters, we are each others' keepers, we are the children of God, all of us and we are meant to learn from God, our parent.

This is tough stuff when there are divisions in groups – a monastery, a block club, a nation, a Church. As Christians, we cannot just say – well that's them, they are hopeless. We are called to bridge the gap with love. To understand What does that look like; what does it sound like? We have the example of Jesus, of the Eucharist, and we have practitioners of non-violence who witness for us through their example and who often left us their writings to study.

Saint Oscar Romero, Dorothy Day, Pope Francis, Pope Benedict XVI, Pope John Paul II, Pope Pius VI, Pope John XXIII, Ken Butigan – of DePaul University and Pax Christi, Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. So many witnesses whose writings can be easily found and accessed in our monastic

library, the Vatican website, and the Chicago Public Library. I am sure you can think of other champions and models of mercy, as well.

Oscar Romero was the archbishop of El Salvador who ministered to the people in times of real oppression. He had to uncover paths of love and non-violence in threatening times. Through his faith and fidelity, he was able to encourage people to follow the gospel in many ways.

This is from a homily he gave in December 1977;

Do not let the snake of resentment nest in your hearts, for there is no greater misfortune than that of a resentful heart, not even against those who tortured your children, not even against the criminal hands that have them disappeared. Don't hate.

So in the case of a real oppressor, a first step to love may be not to hate. That is a tall order, it might even feel heart-breaking but he tells us that it will become heart healing. To get there is key to healing yourself, healing the world, and the connections between you.

In September 1979. Oscar Romero spoke this message to both the oppressor and the oppressed, calling for deep transformation of his society which had developed in ways that took it far away from the kingdom of God. He wrote:

I will not tire of pointing out that if we really want an effective cessation of violence, we must eliminate the violence that is at the base of all violence: structural violence, social injustice, citizens not participating in the public management of the country, repression. All that is what constitutes the primary cause. From there the rest naturally springs.

So we understand that non-violence is not passive; it is love in action. In turning the other cheek, as Christians, we also hear God's long-time call to the people of God, that we identify and address the sources of the violence, that we work for systemic change. Let's commit to doing the inner work each day that makes that response possible.