

7th Sunday in Ordinary Time

A new patient walked into the office of the famous psychiatrist, Dr. Smiley Blanton. The patient noticed a copy of the Bible on Dr. Blanton's desk and said, "Don't tell me that you read the Bible." Dr. Blanton said, "I not only read the Bible but also meditate on it. It is the greatest textbook on human behavior ever written. If people followed its teaching, a lot of psychiatrists could close their offices and go fishing." How is the Bible a textbook on human behavior and a guide to psychiatric health? Today's Gospel gives us an insight into this question. Jesus tells his disciples, "When someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one as well. If anyone wants to go to law with you over your tunic, hand over your cloak as well. Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go for two miles. Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." These were behaviors opposed to the practice of the time.

Palestine was an occupied territory. Roman forces controlled Palestine. So the Jewish citizens had to do whatever a Roman officer commanded him to do. For example, a Roman officer could order a Jew to carry some object for a distance and he had to do it. Recall Simon of Cyrene who was asked to carry the cross of Jesus. If someone strikes you or steals your clothes or is rude to you, what is your normal reaction? An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. We repay to the same measure or a greater measure out of anger and resentment. One evening a truck driver pulled into a restaurant to eat something. As he was eating, three noisy motorcyclists came in. They made their way to the bar and got some beer and gravitated to the table of the truck driver. One poured some salt in his water, another knocked his pie onto the floor and the third managed to knock the trucker's coffee into his lap. The truck driver got up, said nothing, paid his bill and left. "That dude isn't much of a fighter," said one of the motorcyclists. The waiter looked out of the window into the parking lot and said, "He isn't much of a driver either. He just ran over three motorcycles." This is how we generally react to people who hurt us.

But Jesus tells us not to react with anger and resentment. Why? When we act out of anger and resentment and fail to forgive, we end up hurting ourselves more than we hurt our enemies. When we fail to forgive and act out of anger and resentment, we give our enemies power over us—power over our sleep, power over our blood pressure, power over our health and happiness. Our enemies rejoice when they know that our anger rather than forgiveness is tearing us apart and depriving us of our sleep and happiness. On the other hand, responding with love toward those who wrong us benefits both parties far more than does a response of anger or hate. A response of love releases a chain reaction of love. We stop the chain reaction of evil and put in its place a chain reaction of love. St. Paul tells us, "Do not let evil defeat you; instead conquer evil with good" (Rom. 12:21). So, if the people followed the teachings of the Bible, a lot of psychiatrists could close their offices. Let us ask the Lord for the courage and strength to live out these words of Christ: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray

for those who mistreat you. . . . Be merciful just as your Heavenly Father is merciful. Do not condemn others, and God will not condemn you; forgive others, and God will forgive you” (Lk. 6:27-28, 36-37).