

Monday of the Eleventh Week in Ordinary Time

Gospel text (Mt 5:38-42): Jesus said to his disciples: “You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one to him as well. If anyone wants to go to law with you over your tunic, hand him your cloak as well. Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go with him for two miles. Give to the one who asks of you, and do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow.”

“But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil”

Fr. Joaquim MESEGUER García
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Today, Jesus teaches us that forgiveness can overcome hate. Talion's law meant some progress, as it limited the wish to retaliate down to a fair proportion: do unto others as you would have them to, unto you; otherwise, it would be unfairness; this is what the aphorism “eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth” actually means. It was, however, a limited progress, as Jesus Christ emphasizes in the Gospel the need that love overcomes revenge; this is how He expressed it when, on his Cross, He interceded for his executioners: “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do” (Lk 23:34).

Nevertheless, truth should always accompany forgiveness. We do not just forgive because we feel helpless or gravely embarrassed. Quite often, the expression “to turn the other cheek” is misinterpreted as waiving our legitimate rights; certainly, nothing of the sort. To turn the other cheek means to denounce and question whoever has done the injustice committed with a peaceful but categorical gesture; it is like saying: “You slapped me on the cheek, ¿now what, you want to slap me on the other too? Do you really think you are behaving rightly?.” Jesus replied serenely to the high priest's rude servant: “If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong; but if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?” (Jn 18:23).

We can, therefore, see what our Christian behavior must be: not to retaliate, but to stay firm; to be open to forgiveness but clearly say things. It is certainly not an easy task to accomplish, but it is the only way to put a stop to violence and show the world the Divine Grace it is lacking of, so often. St. Basil advises us: “Believe me and you will forget the offences and insults you get from your fellow man. You will see how differently you will be named; he will be called angry and violent while you will be cited as meek and peaceful. One day, he will repent of his violence, but you will never regret your meekness.”

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

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“Therefore, in this kind of injuries which are wont to rouse vengeance Christians will observe such a mean, that hate shall not be caused by the injuries they may receive.” (Saint Augustine)

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“In the Gospel Jesus also speaks to us of holiness, and explains to us the new law, his law. We are required not only to avoid repaying others the evil they have done to us, but also to seek generously to do good to them.” (Francis)

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“Respect for the human person proceeds by way of respect for the principle that ‘everyone should look upon his neighbor (without any exception) as ‘another self,’ above all bearing in mind his life and the means necessary for living it with dignity’ (Vatican II) (...)” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, N° 1931)