

Beyond the Golden Rule

As disciples, we often go to Sunday Mass taking with us our need for healing and repentance and our desire to be spiritually nourished by the Word of God. In our archdiocese we are blessed to have so many inspiring homilists and, if we truly listen, we never leave Mass feeling disappointed.

Today's Gospel reading presents Jesus speaking directly to those who have repented, who are listening (Luke 6:27), and who have committed to discipleship. For the purpose of our reflection, let us imagine that we part of Jesus' Mediterranean culture. Our village has heard of his healing deeds and his amazing preaching, so we seek him out in a synagogue, open field or seashore. We desire to be healed, to hear his words, and to be nourished. Jesus will not disappoint us.

Imagining ourselves as members of an ancient culture, we are familiar with the "golden rule" and the reciprocity of treating others as we expect to be treated. Jesus, ever the master teacher, calls us to go beyond the golden rule, to go beyond the minimal. He invites us to a new standard of excellence whereby we love and treat others as his Father loves and treats us. Jesus challenges us by asking, "what sort of credit is that to you" (6:32) when you love those who love you? We leave the assembly pondering the radical and paradoxical nature of Jesus' teaching.

The message of today's Gospel wasn't recorded just for first Christians. It was also meant for 21st Century disciples:

- We are to get beyond our human urge for retaliation by loving our enemies, by blessing those who curse us, by praying for those who abuse us. As disciples today, facing multiple forms of violence in neighborhoods, cities, and nation, Jesus' call to love those who harm us sounds like the antithesis of God's love. However, we recall Jesus telling us, "this is how you are to pray." (Matt 6:9) When we pray the Our Father, we turn to God and lift up to Him those who harm us. Only by the graces that come from turning to our Father in prayer are we able to face our enemies.
- In our acts of charity toward others we are to go beyond the human judgment of who is worthy of our help and who is not. We are to *give to everyone*, within and outside our community, indiscriminately, and not only our coats but our undergarments as well.
- Our service to others is to go beyond the human expectation of getting a return. Jesus tells us that if we lend something to someone, our act should have the quality of a gift given freely.

Finally, Jesus reminds us that in whatever way we treat or measure others, that is the way that God will measure us. In other words, the Almighty accepts the standards we humans use in our relationships to others. God will use those very same standards in judging and eternally rewarding us.