

7th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Matthew 5:38-48

Holiness is Real

In daily life, few of us think about holiness. Yet in the real world holiness is all around us. Consider for a moment these words of the mother of Officer Peter Jerving, a Milwaukee police officer who was shot to death in the line of duty.

At his funeral his mother prayed that our Heavenly Father would “*wipe away any bitterness toward the young man who cut down Peter. Bless the family of that young man and especially the heart of his mother. She also lost a son on February 7th. Please help them see that Peter was not their enemy, nor am I.*” (Patty Jerving, February 13, 2023, WTMJ TV)

The readings from Leviticus, 1 Corinthians, and the Gospel of Matthew, for the 7th Sunday in Ordinary Time are uniquely related in calling us to holiness. Leviticus reminds us, “the foundation of holiness for both God and the people is to give oneself for others.” (2023 Workbook for Lectors, pg.66) The call to holiness in Leviticus is marked by an attitude of “otherness,” that is lived by loving our neighbor as we love ourselves.

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul reminds us that our bodies, where the Spirit of God dwells, are a temple of God. Body and soul, we are holy because we, believers, belong to Christ and through Christ to God.

The Gospel reading from Matthew helps us further develop the notion of otherness and the recognition that the bodies and lives of all human beings are holy. All who follow Jesus are to become perfect as our heavenly Father, himself, is perfect. We are to love our enemies and pray for them.

This past week those who mourn were cushioned with all the Valentine messages. Today the softness of the cards, the candy, the flowers are quickly being replaced with spring cards, candy, colorful dresses and shirts – commerce is here to help us skip Lent, find a sunny beach, and put aside an attitude of otherness.

However, Jesus speaks to us from the scriptures and in the voices of mothers and offers us another message, “I am Love. Be loving. Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. Love your neighbor as yourself. With me, you can be holy.”

Submitted by Dr. Rosemary Murphy