

“Be Merciful”

“Love your enemies”? Do good, bless, pray for them? Let them smack you on the other cheek? Let them have your tunic? Give to the beggar? Don’t expect to get your stuff back that has been stolen from you? Are you serious, Jesus?

If I do what Jesus says, how will that turn out for me? I’ll be abused, hated, cursed, reviled. I’ll be taken advantage of. I’ll be poor. NO, I’m afraid of what will happen. His words make me realize that I “fear, love, and trust” in other things above Him.

His words here in our text remind me of what He says elsewhere – “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Mt. 19:26).

We hear these words of Jesus and think – impossible – and it is, for us sinners. But Jesus does all of this, and even more!

He loves His enemies, does good to those who hate Him, blesses those who curse Him – prays for those who betray Him and run away from Him.

He not only offers the other cheek to those who strike Him, but also offers His head for the crown of thorns, and His hands and feet for the nails.

They strip away His cloak, and His tunic too, leaving Him naked. He gives to the beggars (whether it is healing to the sick, release from evil spirits, or life to the dead).

He loves them perfectly, in fullest measure, to the end. “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down His life for His friends” (Jn. 15:13).

The point of all this is not for you to BE Jesus. He’s not laying these words out like a ladder that you have to climb in order to be in God’s graces – to become His beloved son. Rather, because of Jesus’ love for you – you are “sons of the Most High” – sons who reflect the love of your heavenly Father – “for He is kind to the ungrateful and the evil” – therefore, “Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.”

Indeed, in Christ Jesus, the Father is kind to us who are ungrateful and evil. In Christ Jesus, we have received the Father’s mercy.

To live as a child of God in this sin-fallen and sin-filled world, and in our sinful flesh – is not easy. However, rarely does it come to fisticuffs because of Jesus – rarely do people strike you and beat you because of His name. Rarely does someone steal your cloak, or your stuff. Rarely are you called to lay down your life for the friend. But it could, and you should.

Rather than standing in Jesus' shoes and considering all the things that HE faced – what about the things YOU face in your everyday life – in your conversations, in dealing with your family, and working with your coworkers?

The temptation is to play by the world's rules – to fear what the world fears – to listen to the world's advice, which says – if you love as Jesus says, you will get hurt. The temptation is to love those who love you – to do good to others only when it will benefit you – to lend to others only when it is risk-free.

Dearly beloved, “sons of the Most High” – though you are in the world, you are not of the world. You are a new creation – baptized into Christ Jesus – created to do good works – to love, to be merciful, “even as your Father is merciful.”

You live by faith in the One who loves you and showers His mercy upon you. Of yourself, it is impossible to “fear, love and trust in [Him] above all things” – but with God all things are possible.

You are like Joseph in our Old Testament reading. Because of his father's love for him – his own brothers hated him. They cursed him, reviled him – threw him into a pit and sold him off to a passing caravan. Because they lived as his enemies instead of as his brothers – Joseph ends up in Egypt, and in jail.

And now, his brothers stand before him – and it is Joseph who has the upper hand. He is in a position of great power and authority – he has the opportunity to get revenge for all that they have done to him – but he seeks not his own benefit, but theirs.

Joseph lives by the Word of God, of Jesus who says – “And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.”

Would you have had mercy on your brothers, as Joseph did? Does that sound impossible after all they had done to you? Do you wonder how Joseph could love his enemies and do good to those who hated him?

Joseph was merciful because our heavenly Father is merciful. Again, and again he speaks of how the Lord has been at work in all of this. Yes, he suffered much at their hands – but God was at work in order to have mercy on them. All this happened for the saving of many lives.

While it is not recorded in Genesis 45, throughout the story of Joseph in Genesis, there is this constant refrain – “the Lord was with Joseph.” He was with Joseph when he was thrown into the pit and the dungeon. He was with Joseph when rejected by his brothers and Potiphar’s wife. And the Lord is with YOU!

That is the blessing of your Baptism into Christ Jesus – the promise that the Lord is with you always, even unto the end of the age. He is with you when you are hated, reviled, beaten, and taken advantage of. He is with you when tempted to get revenge and seek your own benefit. He is with you – so that you may love, and have mercy on others.

“But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for He is kind to the ungrateful and evil.”

Your heavenly reward is great – it is safe – not because you love others as you should – but because God has loved you and been merciful to you, in Christ Jesus. For with God, nothing is impossible. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.