

## SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME-C

February 24, 2019

*First Reading – 1 Samuel 26:2,7-9,12-13,22-23*

*Responsorial Psalm – Psalm 103*

*Second Reading – 1 Corinthians 15:45-49*

*Gospel – Luke 6:27-38*

My dear people of God:

I wish to start our reflection from the Responsorial Psalm: *The Lord is kind and merciful*” from Psalm 103.

This mercy and kindness of God has been demonstrated through the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ, the new Adam. Paul in the Second Reading, compares Adam, the first man (the earthly one) with Jesus Christ, the second and last Adam ( the heavenly One). Our natural and physical body is the product of Adam. It can die. But Christ, the last Adam will give us eternal life. The first Adam received life through the breath of Yahweh yet he died because of sin.

Paul in another letter, which is actually the Letter to the Romans, chapter 5, verses 12 to 20, says:

*Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned, for until the law, sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of HIM who was to come. But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man’s offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the ONE MAN, JESUS CHRIST, abounded to many. And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification. For if by the one man’s offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the ONE, JESUS CHRIST. Therefore, as through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through ONE MAN’S righteous act the*

*free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by ONE MAN'S obedience many will be made righteous. Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Now, back to the Responsorial Psalm. The Lord is truly kind and merciful. His Spirit raised Jesus from the dead and dwells in us. He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to our mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in us.

Let us go to the First Reading. Please know that our first reading is taken from the twenty-sixth chapter of the First Book of Samuel. Please know that the liturgists who made the lectionary skipped several verses. Their purpose may have been to shorten the reading, knowing that the lesson to be learned is not lost. Nonetheless, may I encourage you to read the entire chapter 26.

Please know that we are contemplating on how David reacted to Saul who was hunting him as if he (David) were a bird. In a reverse of roles, David was extremely magnanimous and kind to Saul at a moment when the Lord delivered Saul to David's hand. Saul, the hunter became the hunted, yet David spared him.

It happened this way: One night, Saul was sleeping in the open camp (obviously not under a tent) surrounded by his general (*Abner*) and his soldiers. It was a normal military practice in the old times that the chief or the king sleeps at the center of the circle of soldiers. It was also normal to thrust the king's spear into the ground with his water jug, hanging from the lower extremity of the spear now on the top. The Oriental spear had (and still has), a spike at the lower extremity, intended for hanging something (like a water jug) when the pointed part of the spear is thrust into the ground while the warrior is at rest. The water jug was usually hanged from the spear near the warrior's head. In torrid regions, a drink in the night time was very refreshing. It was during this night that Yahweh cast upon Saul and his soldiers a deep sleep. It was easy to distinguish Saul because he was sleeping at the center of the circle.

David was with his assistant Abishai when they stealthily went to Saul's camp. Since God made them sleep so deeply, nobody from Saul's group noticed David and Abishai, in their midst. And here is Abishai arrogantly declaring

that *“God had delivered your enemy into your hand, let me nail him to the ground with just one thrust of his own spear”*(verse 8). The ferocity of Abishai is extremely clear from his barbaric language, but David's magnanimity and respect towards the Lord's anointed soared far above the notions of his assistant. Despite Saul's cruelty and lack of right principle, David did not stain his hands with Saul's blood. Thus he obtained the best of victories over Saul, by heaping coals of fire on his head. He only got the spear and the water jug before going to the opposite hilltop.

Brothers and sisters, here we are contemplating on David's sense of God's justice which never clouded his right judgment and right reason, notwithstanding Saul's cruelty towards him. Saul had sunk to a very pitch of degradation, yet that was no reason for David to imitate him in doing wrong. David did *the best and most dutiful course*, instead of precipitating his fall by staining his hands with Saul's blood, thereby contracting the guilt of a great crime.

Vengeance is not ours, but God's. God is teaching us never to dignify the wrong that even our worst enemy does to us. Is this easy? No. Never! But it is doable.

In a mocking gesture (which was subtly directed against Saul) against Abner, David stood on the top of the opposite hill afar off, and cried to Abner: *“Abner, what kind of man are you? Are you not supposed to be the best soldier in Israel? Why did you not protect the king? . . . you and your soldiers deserve to die for not protecting the king. . . where are the king's spear and water jug?”*(verses 15-17).

This episode of David's sense of God's justice and magnanimous forbearance are obviously lessons for us today. Just as David did not appropriate unto himself the right to exact vengeance, so too, must we respect the exclusive punitive rights of God.

It brings us immediately to the first line of today's Gospel which is the continuation of the Sermon of Jesus on the Plain. Jesus said to his disciples: *“To you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.* (verse 27).

The rest of the Sermon of Jesus on the Plain would teach us that God wants us to do beyond/go beyond what the ordinary Jew at that time would do. As Christians, we are morally obliged not just to follow the minimum requirement of the law; but to comply with the law as something we owe to

ourselves as followers of the ONE who gave HIS ALL - without expecting something in return.

There is an interesting teaching here about *“offering the other cheek”* in verse 29. In the Semitic way, striking somebody using the forehand (which is stronger) is a normal thing. But striking somebody using the backhand is meant to insult the person being struck. The backhand is used to shoot down/shut off a statement spoken by another person, or to shamefully dismiss another person, thereby disrespecting his dignity. This gesture is tantamount to scaring an insect or a fly away from the food. The person who uses the backhand views the other person as a mere insect; and this is a dehumanizing insult. Jesus is teaching us to be ready to bear an insult after an injury. He is calling for a full surrender of all our personal rights, never to return insult for insult in retaliation - which is what most of us (myself not exempted) normally do. And sadly, this is how worldly people act.

My dear people of God: Today, Jesus is offering us a rare opportunity to share His LOVE by responding to hatred with love - instead of retaliation. Who knows that we might grab someone's attention by doing so, and afford us a chance to live and share the Gospel ?

Please be mindful that in some bibles, *“offering the other cheek”* is rendered as *“turning the other cheek”*. Please do not fall into the mistake of thinking that *to turn the other cheek* means “to look away”: that is, not to look at an incident, or a wrong doing, or a wrong situation, or a crime in order not to be involved. The main thing here is *to be indifferent*. Please know that it is NOT the biblical meaning.

Brothers and sisters: I love the way the Gospel ends: *“Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give, and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you.”*

What do the readings teach us today? The Gospel teaches us that going beyond and doing beyond the ordinary will earn us the pleasure of God. He will also reward us with an extraordinary prize. The first reading teaches us that David went beyond the “normal” scheme of things. We can do it too. In the second reading, Paul taught us that Christ, through His Passion, Death, and Resurrection is the life-giving Adam. Let us hold on to Him because He is kind and merciful. Amen.