

Saint Joseph Parish, San Mateo CA  
Sermon of Trinity IV  
Luke 6:36-42  
July 2, 2023  
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In this morning's gospel we hear Jesus' words recorded by Luke in the Sermon on the Plain, a near parallel to Matthew's Sermon on the Mount. The background for the gospel this morning is to be found in the Old testament book of Leviticus: Here is a clear and simple New Jerusalem Bible translation: "Anyone who injures a neighbor shall receive the same in return, broken limb for broken limb, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. As the injury inflicted, so will be the injury suffered"..Our Lord now refers the law specifically to the fault-finding spirit behind reprisal..tit for tat..payback.

Once Jesus has walked upon the earth, the Law has been elevated, not abolished. Our Lord says, "I am bringing the law to perfection IN MYSELF.". We are reminded by Jeremiah's prophetic vision about Jesus, that the new Law is written not on old law parchment but on His heart...then, our converted hearts.

Accordingly, Jesus says then, "But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil; but whosoever offend thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also."..altogether a new way of merciful living by the will of God. When asked, most strangers to the faith say showing mercy by turning the other cheek is the most distinctive trait of Christians, but that such perfection is humanly unattainable.

Following the same spirit behind engaging in fault-finding, let's shift focus today to Jesus' words in the 42nd verse: "Why do you see the splinter that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the splinter that is your own eye."

The "you" whom our Lord reproaches here begins with a movement toward the other. Perhaps it is just a look. Whatever that look is, Jesus says, an individual's blindness concerning him- or herself corresponds to it. Clearly, Jesus gives us a profound spiritual insight and it's worthy of pondering for our inner lives and outward behavior.

Anyway, the “you” believes that his look toward the person with a splinter in her eye is well-meaning..or at least fair. This is joined to his intention to “help”..following our own ideas about showing mercy... But in his or her self-blindness the look and the words become damaging and have a one-sided, judgmental effect. In the “you’s” search for imperfection, the other disappears as a person... No chance now for showing mercy..We can do so much injury without words..with just a look!!

Jesus recognizes that the “you” intends to do good, but actually accomplishes evil by pointing out another’s fault. Some moral theologians suggest this is a result of an oversensitive instinct for order. And who does not seek for order surrounding one’s life these days!

In His perfect understanding of human nature, Jesus is saying that our image of other people is distorted by our own projections, and that our self-image is occluded by our defensiveness..poor fallen creatures..the more we are attacked or just simply offended,

the more our resistance strengthens. So, the other person will close up when the “you”, in his blindness toward himself, tries to remove the splinter out of the other’s eye. The relation between human brothers or sisters then falls into jeopardy and the risk of permanent alienation.

The concern Jesus has for us is of a different kind than that of the “you” about his opponent..the one we fail to see and count as brother. And the problem He pinpoints is not a mere mote or splinter, but a log..a very serious disturbance of our way of beholding others. But true to the good news, our Lord is not judging us in order to cast us to the side or condemn us, but to lay open a new hope and a secure future for each of us based on our learning merciful intention and action. He is concerned about us in a uniquely loving way...the way He alone can love. He doesn’t judge, He doesn’t take our hope in becoming better Christians away. He gives hope a new face out of His mercy. His merciful face.

So, instead of suggesting a renewal of the old law with its

spirit of fault-finding, He gives us His instructions..to build the foundation for that “distinctive” trait of Christians for showing mercy. He leaves us with a task..to become conscious of one’s own hypocrisy and to work on oneself..by God’s grace to bring new life to our spiritual lives..Any fault-finding is His to do with our insides.

And to complete the task, one needs an untroubled relationship to one’s fellow brothers and sisters, Christian or not. For it is impossible to see the light, to emerge from blindness about oneself on one’s own. What is so new is that Jesus takes the initiative to us. What do I mean? Only by His grace and Presence will it be possible to overcome any hypocrisy within us.

As St. Luke sees it, Jesus gives us four steps toward our practice of mercy..to take us where He wants us in relationships: the renunciation of the right to exercise authority over others as a judge would..openness to the words Jesus speaks, especially those that make us wince..recognition of our serious mistakes, the “logs”- not the

splinters..and especially, the readiness to become a person in His image while He removes the “log”.

Only then can we become like Jesus..only as renewed persons can we mercifully suggest- and not blindly prescribe- a minimal change- the removal of our sister’s splinter. There is only one Physician. Amen.