

Magnanimity

The readings of today's Gospel pushes us further. Jesus is always lifting us up to a higher level of perfection. It is a reminder of the universal call to holiness. We are all called to become holy; it means that when we die, we go straight to heaven. It is a central message of the Second Vatican Council. We are not called just to be a good Christian, but to become holy. It is not a matter of saying many rosaries or being involved in the activities of the parish, but to have a new heart, the heart of Jesus, to let Jesus shine through us. Can I become holy? No, it's impossible. But God can make us holy. Why? He can do impossible things. How? We need to desire it above everything and put the means to receive his grace: Communion and Confession, prayer, follow his will, behave accordingly, love everybody.

And here we come to the first message of today's Gospel: Love your enemies. How can we do that? If it is hard to love the people we live with, how can we love our enemies. First, we shouldn't have enemies; we should love everyone. But we are not a 100 Rands note that everybody loves. If people don't like us it is not our fault. Our Lord is not asking us to like everybody but to love them. In the first reading we see King David respecting the life of his enemy, King Saul, who wanted to kill him. Twice he spared his life and the Lord was pleased with that.

Our Lord is asking us today to be magnanimous, to have a big soul, this is what magna anima means, a big heart where everybody fits in. The Gospel exhorts us to bless those who curse us, to pray for those who persecute us, to do good without expecting anything in return, to be merciful as your heavenly Father is merciful, to pardon everyone, to be generous without measuring and calculating. It means to have Jesus' heart. It reminds me of Alexander the Great, also called Magnum, like the ice cream. Once a beggar asked him for alms. He ordered to make him Lord of five cities. The beggar answered dumbfounded that he didn't ask for so much. Alexander responded: You ask as who you are, I give as who I am.

The temptation is to keep our hearts in a safe, with seven locks, not to get hurt. We have all been hurt, when we have given our hearts to someone else. The person who loves you, makes you cry. But then it becomes a heart of stone, a heart that doesn't feel, insensitive to human suffering. The letter to the Hebrews reminds us: "If you hear his voice, harden not your hearts." If you have placed your heart in Jesus, it cannot get broken, because it is in the right place. Saints have a tender heart, exposed to everyone, but it is defended because it is full of the real love, God's love. Jesus gives us the right environment for our hearts to grow and expand.

The second thing Our Lord is asking us today is to offer the other cheek. A man went to a hermit and stole all his meager possessions. He allowed him to take everything. When he was leaving, the hermit ran towards him with a basket he had forgotten, asking him to take it with him. It was the last thing the desert father possessed. When the thief saw his beautiful happy face, he returned everything to him, asking him for the happiness and freedom he possessed. We need to be ready to give everything to God. We cannot keep anything back. Everything we have comes from him.