

7th Sunday
2/19/2023

PRAYING FOR OUR ENEMIES

He was a man of learning and of wit; dedicated to his family and devoted to his faith and his country, a man of outstanding integrity. Henry VIII named him Lord Chancellor of England but when the king separated himself from the rest of the Church, he resigned, was arrested and imprisoned in the Tower of London for over a year. Put on trial, he was found guilty through false testimony and condemned to death. He was beheaded in 1535 insisting that he died the king's good servant but God's first. His name was St. Thomas More.

Now St. Thomas More once wrote a prayer on behalf of one's enemies. He said:

*Almighty God, have mercy on this person
and on all that bear me evil will and would me harm,
and on their faults and mine together...,
make us saved souls in heaven together,
where we may ever live and love together with thee and thy blessed saints,
O glorious Trinity, for the bitter passion of our sweet savior Christ. Amen.*

When was the last time you prayed for one of your enemies or just someone you don't like?

We pray for our friends and families, for our leaders, for the sick and even for the dead but this command to pray for our enemies is perhaps one the most overlooked teachings of Jesus. If you don't like some people and you're a Christian, all the more you should be praying for them.

Jesus tells us to pray for our enemies but why? When we pray we broaden our heart. Pope Francis describes prayer as the antidote to hatred. When we pray we ground ourselves more deeply in the reality of God's love. When we pray we start to think differently, to feel differently and to act differently. When we pray we start to put on the mind of Christ and to love as he loves. When we pray for our enemies,

we start to think of them differently and prayer can help free us from the demons of hatred, revenge and resentment. When we pray we learn to love as God loves.

It's easy to love those who love us but God loved us not because we were good but because God is good and we reflect the love of God when we love those who don't love us.

This will challenge us our entire life. It calls us to be heroic but as hard as it is, *it's not the ideal of a chosen few but the obligation of every Christian*. The love we bear for family and friends is well and good but the true measure of Christian love is the ability to love those who don't love us. We overcome our enemies by love. What Jesus' offers is a strategy for revealing injustice and hopefully for changing someone's heart.

In the second reading, St. Paul speaks of the temple of God saying that it is holy and that we are that temple. The holiness of that temple is love and particularly love of our enemies. That temple is desecrated through hatred.

In the first reading God says, *Be holy for I the Lord your God, am holy*. We show this holiness by being whole, by even loving those who don't love us. We do it not by nurturing grudges and not by revenge but rather by forgiveness. Jesus didn't just tell us to love, do good, bless and pray. He did this. Dying on the cross he cried out for forgiveness for those who were killing him while they were doing it.

In December of 1983 St. John Paul II visited a Roman prison where he personally met with and forgave, the man who two and a half years earlier, shot and nearly killed him. When was the last time you prayed for one of your enemies? Think of John Paul II, think of Thomas More, think of others like them and most of all, think of Jesus. Then think about those with whom you are upset. In many cases, what bothers us can, by comparison, seem petty. Sometimes we hear about sweet revenge but revenge isn't sweet, it's bitter. Forgiveness is sweet. Revenge continues the cycle of violence.

Lent is almost here and again, I invite you to take what I call the Fifteen Minute Challenge. Each day during Lent, I challenge you to spend fifteen minutes in prayer. Whether it be prayerfully reading the Bible, praying the Rosary, spending time in adoration, sitting with God in silence or combinations of any of these, just spend a

minimum of fifteen minutes a day in prayer and at Easter, see how different your life will be and how better it will be.

This year I also invite you to think of an enemy or perhaps just someone you don't like or that doesn't like you and pray for that person; not in an arrogant way that looks down on that person but by truly praying for that person and to kick it up a notch further, to pray for a specific good for that person. Pray as St. Thomas More did that God look upon your faults those of that person together, asking that together you may someday praise God in heaven. Do this and by Easter you may well feel differently about that person.

We're to love our neighbors as ourselves, we're to love our enemies and eventually Jesus will raise it still higher when he tells us to love as he loves.

Loving our enemies is hard. It goes against our feelings but love isn't a feeling but a decision. We don't do this by ourselves but with God's help within a communion of disciples that we call the Church. We do it with the strength we receive here in the Eucharist as we come together in the name of Christ, listen to his word and receive him in Holy Communion. Here we are strengthened to live lives of intentional faith.

When was the last time you prayed for one of your enemies?