

Commentary on the Readings for February 19, 2023

The 7th Sunday in Ordinary Time

In the First and the Third Reading (the Gospel) for today, we are challenged to "...*be holy (or perfect) as your heavenly Father is perfect.*" You might say, "Wow! That is some challenge!" However, both readings go on to explain how this can come about. God knows that we mere mortals cannot be perfect or even holy without His help; and He is there to give that help when we are ready to call on Him for it. He is waiting for us and wants us to ask Him for help, and then He asks us to do our part. Let us see what that is:

The **First Reading** is from the *Book of Leviticus (19:1-19)*. In this brief passage, we are given the key to happiness in this life and the same key is our entry to heaven. It is all contained in the last sentence: "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself, for I am the Lord.*" If a counselor told you that to "love your neighbor" was all you had to do to be happy in this world, would not that be sufficient for you to at least try? Here it is. God is giving you the same advice, and He even leaves the door open for some exceptions.

The **Responsorial Psalm (103:1-13)**, is a prayer in which the psalmist tells us to bless the Lord as His many gifts and blessings are enumerated. In other words, God is not one to stand over us with a stick to punish every mistake we make. He takes all things into consideration, "like a father who has compassion on his children; so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him." The word "fear" in this case means "reveres" or "obeys."

The **Second Reading** is from *St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians (3:16-23)*. Here Paul is telling us that "we are God's temple" and "the Spirit of God dwells within us"; that is, if we are without sin. For this is what God wants of us; to be so closely united with Him that He in fact dwells within us and then, like a built-in GPS system, He will guide us through the rough roads of daily life. What's not to like about that?

The **Gospel Reading** is from the *Gospel of Matthew (5:38-48)*. This is a continuation of the great *Sermon on the Mount*. The entire Sermon on the Mount (**Matthew: Chapters 5, 6 & 7**) might be considered a "blueprint" or "instruction manual" for "How to Be Happy in This World." However, it is not easy; but then, what good things in this life are "easy"? Jesus begins by explaining to the people of His time and culture that the Mosaic Law permitted punishment, but only to the extent of the original injury; and no further. However, now He wants us to go the "extra mile" and "turn the other cheek." Well, not exactly! What he is saying is "Treat your enemies as you would want to be treated under the same conditions." In other words, "*Love your enemies, your neighbors, your wayward child, or relative, as yourself*" in the biblical sense or meaning of LOVE and that will be sufficient.

As St. Paul tells us, "All the commandments are summed up in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love never wrongs the neighbor; hence love is the fulfillment of the law." (See **Romans 13:9b, 10**) Something to think about during your prayer time this week! **MFB**