

Boarbank Hall, Mass Homily, Seventh Sunday of the Year

(Lev. 19:1-2, 7-8; 1Cor 3:16-23; Mt. 5:38-48)



The words of the Lord in the Sermon on the Mount at times do not make for easy listening. As with so much of Christ's teaching, what he says seems to run contrary to human nature and to our normal way of thinking and acting. We are to 'turn the other cheek' and 'go the extra mile', in our dealings with those we meet on our daily journey. It is a relatively simple matter to love our friends, but Christ calls upon us to expand our horizons, and engage with those whom we would prefer to avoid. More therefore is required of us as disciples of Christ.

With Christ, the Kingdom of God has come among us, and different rules and ways of thinking now apply. In fact our behaviour towards others should reflect that of our Father in heaven who showers down blessings from heaven indiscriminately on just and unjust alike. Today's gospel concludes with the exhortation to 'be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.' That is not meant to intimidate us. Christ is implying that we have a gracious and merciful Father in heaven, kind and caring to all his creation, and we are to replicate those qualities in our dealings with others.

The Kingdom of which we became part when we were baptised, is an environment where love, truth, justice and peace should prevail. As we grow in grace we increasingly reflect the image of Christ to the world around us. We are not asked to be perfect by our own efforts or strength. No one more than St. Augustine was aware of the frailty of human nature and for the need of God's grace to carry out the will of God. And that grace is freely given. Someone wrote recently that we can demand more of ourselves than God does. As the psalmist puts it, 'He knows of what we are made.'

In our reading from the book of Leviticus, God commanded the people of Israel to be holy, for he himself was holy. To be holy is somehow to be different, it literally means to be 'separate'. For us believers that means not to go the way of the world, but to put on the mind of Christ, to be the new people that God intends us to be. St. Paul tells the Corinthians that they are the temple of God, a place where God's Holy Spirit dwells. We are a holy people, sent to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. We need to be reminded first of who we are, and then we can live out confidently the demands of discipleship in whatever circumstances we find ourselves in everyday life. Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. St. Augustine was fond of quoting a text from Paul's letter to the Philippians which he clearly found reassuring: *Not that I have already attained this, (the resurrection from the dead) or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own...* (Phil. 3:12). Like St. Paul, We keep trying!

+Michael G Campbell OSA

Bishop of Lancaster