

HOMILY ON THE SIXTH SUNDAY BY FATHER FRANCIS

“Being merciful as our heavenly Father is merciful.” Forgiving others even when it hurts.

Dear brothers and sisters, last Sunday’s homily centered on the “Blessing of Trusting in the Lord.” This Sunday, we shall investigate one of the ramifications of this trust in the Lord. Hence, the theme of our homily is “Being merciful as our heavenly Father is merciful”(Luke 6:36). Our keynote verse is love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you” (Luke 6:27-28). Our Lord exemplified this command in his own life. While still hanging on the cross. He blessed and prayed for those who crucified him in these words, “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). Dearly beloved in Christ, the command to love one’s enemies and do good to them is still a tall order from the Lord himself. The implication of this is that Lord is calling us to a nobility that is ours as human beings made in the image and likeness of God. The call here is to rise above instinctive, knee jerk animal reaction to a higher level of divine oblation love that identifies us as sons and daughters of God: *homo sapiens, homo volens and homo orans*. God makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45). He forgave those who betrayed, denied and crucified in him. In fact, the death of Christ on the cross brought salvation to everyone including his executioners.

The instinctive reaction to offence or aggression is to either to flee or fight back, perhaps more ferociously. But this is not God’s way. The Word of God, on the other hand, asks us not respond with the first thought that comes to our mind in the face of an offense or aggression. Hence, the Word would ask and counsel, has anybody offended you or crossed you or harmed you in your person or in your property? Do not entertain resentment, retaliation or revenge. Bury the hatchet. Take, for instance, your son stole some money from you, or someone lied about you, or someone cut you off in traffic, or someone hindered you from selling a house or a bicycle or that someone fired you from a job that you like. The instinctive thing is to pay such person in kind, but the Lord asks us to do the contrary. “Take no revenge and cherish no grudge against your own people. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord” (Leviticus 19:18). In other words, “Be merciful as your heavenly Father is merciful”(Luke 6:36).

In the story of David and Saul, we see a clear example of the feasibility of this command. David was good to Saul, he risked his life among the Philistines to defend Saul and the entire nation. That was not all; David played the harp to help Saul out of his depression. Saul, on the other hand, sought to take David’s life by all means. Simply because he was jealous of David. In the passage we read today from 1 Samuel 26, Saul was in pursuit of David but he fell instead into David’s hand. David could have killed him, but he did not. He spared his life.

Dear brothers and sisters, this is the message for today and always. Is there anybody who had offended you? It could be a church member, a co-worker, a family member, your spouse or your friend. You may be carrying a grudge or resentment for a long time against this person. Today is the day to start a new life and let go and let God. Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount and on the Plain calls us to this. Meditating on this down the through the centuries, the holy Mother Church teaches, “The Gospel thus brings the Law to its fullness through imitation of the perfection of the heavenly Father, through forgiveness of enemies and prayer for persecutors, in emulation of the divine generosity” (CCC1968).

Elucidating this further, the Church teaches,

The Lord asks us to love as he does (even our enemies) to make ourselves the neighbor of those farthest away, and to love children and the poor as Christ himself. The Apostle Paul has given an incomparable depiction of charity: "charity is patient and kind, charity is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Charity does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Charity bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things (1 Corinthians 13:4-7, CCC 1825).

The summary of this teaching of the Lord on the love of our enemies is this, “I give you a new commandment .. love one another as I have loved you” (John 13:34). Peace be with you!