

SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME YEAR A

THEME: **BE HOLY AS YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER IS HOLY**

In our first reading today, we heard the Lord directing Moses to tell the Israelites that they must be holy as their heavenly Father is holy. At the end of the Gospel reading, Jesus said to his disciples, “You must therefore be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Both statements actually mean the same thing. To be holy is to be perfect, and to be perfect is to be holy.

The two statements were addressed to the entire people of Israel and all the disciples of Jesus respectively. They were not addressed to any elite group or group of religious or priests. That is to say, the Lord demanded holiness of the entire people of Israel, while Jesus made it mandatory for all his disciples to seek perfection. In other words, the quest for holiness or perfection is not optional for any disciple of Jesus. It is a “must”. This made the Catholic Church to conclude that holiness or perfection is the vocation of every disciple of Christ; that is, every Christian.

Both the first reading and the Gospel passage agree on the means to achieve holiness or perfection. It is love. But it is not just any kind of love. Rather it is a love that extends to even so-called enemies. We must love everyone. The reason is simply that God, our heavenly Father, loves everyone, and does not withhold his favors from anyone, including “bad men” and “dishonest men”. And since we are required to be holy and perfect as our heavenly Father is holy and perfect, then we must love as he loves. We must love universally; that is, we must love everyone, including those who have been bad to us and those who have been dishonest to us.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, as Christians, we should not make any enemies for ourselves, we cannot say that man or that woman is our enemy. But we cannot stop someone else taking us as enemy; that is, someone else saying that we are his or her enemy or treating us with hostility. We cannot stop someone hating us. It would be good if everyone would be nicely disposed towards us, if everyone would just love us. But unfortunately, the reality of our lives as human beings is something else. Whether we like it or not, some people there may just hate the mere sight of us, and go on to translate that into actions that are designed to hurt us seriously.

Even in the face of all these, the obligation on us to love universally, and be holy or perfect as our heavenly Father is holy does not allow us to return the compliment, to pay evil for evil. Rather, in the words of today’s readings, that obligation would forbid us to exact vengeance or bear grudges against anyone or offer the wicked any resistance. The obligation for Christian love requires us to turn the other cheek, make no revenge, and even pray for those who hate us.