

- I. We read the Luke version of the Lord's teaching about loving your enemies. Here's the Matthew version: You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? (Matt 5:43-47)
  - A. This is a pretty challenging teaching
    1. Not only love enemies but bless them when they curse you, do good to them when they hate you, pray for them when they spitefully use you and persecute you
    2. And if you don't do this you are no better than sinners and tax collectors. Even they are nice to those who are nice to them!
    3. So the difference between sinner and saint is not how we treat good, nice people, but how we treat enemies and unkind, rude, nasty people
    4. Wow!
    5. This is the opposite of what our natural feelings guide us to do. Love your neighbor and hate your enemy is how that part works
    6. Picture for a moment praying for someone who has hurt you. Not simply praying that they see the error of their ways so that they are sorry for hurting you – that's really praying for yourself. But praying that good may be present in their lives, that the best might happen to them
    7. That's a startling idea
  - B. As we explore this topic today, we'll see that loving enemies and praying for them is not just a good idea that super-spiritual people get to; it is a necessary part of being spiritual at all
    1. The Lord is calling on us to stretch ourselves here because not doing so is really spiritually damaging, and loving our friends amounts to little until we are willing to give up hating our enemies
- II. As we start, then, I invite you to think of someone who you have feeling of enmity or disdain for, someone for whom you feel resentment or even hate
  - A. There's so much political rancor that that might be a place to start, but an even better place might be someone close to you
- III. A lot of New Church teaching explains passages in Scripture by giving a deeper meaning that sometimes carries a different message that the literal text does
  - A. The treatment of this teaching simply confirms that what it says is true.
  - B. "The moment the opportunity exists [angels] do good both to enemies and to friends" (AC 8223:2)
  - C. "The Lord taught that good should be done out of charity to an opponent or enemy" (TCR 409)

- D. "No one should be hated, not even an enemy" (AC 10490:6)
- IV. Two important things show up in the teaching about this
  - A. The first is that treating someone like an enemy harms our souls. It gives us permission to hate, and hate comes from hell
    - 1. We use the word hate in ways we don't really mean. I hate the opposing football team, I hate brussel sprouts. We don't really mean we hate them
    - 2. But when someone is an enemy, we can give ourselves permission to wish ill, to be glad when misfortune befalls them, to hate
    - 3. This is even more true when they have hurt us
      - a. A desire for justice is one thing, but hate is from hell and gives hell power over us
- V. Let's think about what an enemy means
  - A. If you are an Eagles fan, well Giants and Cowboys fans are enemies, but hopefully that's a good hearted rivalry
  - B. In movies in my lifetimes we've had the following enemies: Germans, Russians, terrorists, Chinese, mafia, greedy corporations, mysterious groups of power hungry people, US Govt agencies run amok
  - C. They are often portrayed as irredeemably evil, which gives us permission to feel a savage delight when the good guy blows them away or crushes their efforts at world domination. Not very healthy attitudes, to be sure
  - D. Yet there's a point of truth in that. The forces of hell, portrayed in Scripture by the enemies the Israelites faces, are irredeemably evil. They are like a virus that will never stop attacking and the only thing to do is to fight them
    - 1. But not matching hate with hate. If you hate even those terrible devils you make yourself one of them and they win
    - 2. What if you could feel compassion for the pain they experience because of their poor choices? That removes their power
  - E. And ... our ordinary opponents are not irredeemably evil. They have good and bad. And the Lord calls us to look for the good. Don't hate
- VI. The second point at issue here is that loving enemies and doing good to them does not necessarily mean pandering or caving
  - A. As our reading said, sometimes acting from charity means punishing, and punishing or offering consequences can be an act of love
    - 1. It can be just and good as long as we are honoring the first point: don't do it from hate, or contempt.
  - B. As the other reading said, do so because you truly want their good
  - C. Desire the good of others and that means looking for it in them
  - D. Look to respond with mercy rather than contempt.
  - E. This last is an import, so let's pause to reflect on it. Consider this teaching:
  - F. "Everyone can see that love for the neighbor and love for self are opposing loves. Love for the neighbor wishes well from self to everyone else, whereas love for self wishes well only to itself from everyone else. Love for the neighbor wishes to serve everyone else, while love for self wishes everyone else to serve self. Love for the neighbor regards everyone else as a sibling

and friend, whereas love for self regards everyone else as its servant, and if they do not serve, as its enemy. In a word, it has regard for itself alone, and for others scarcely as human beings, whom at heart it values less than it does its horses and dogs. Moreover, because it regards them as so inferior, it also makes it of no consequence to do evil to them.” (DP 276:2)

G. Enemies we want to treat like servants; people we love want to treat like family and friends

1. Now sometimes we don't treat our families that well
2. “A person's enemies shall be in his own household” the Lord said
3. We can treat those closest to us as enemies at times, but the Lord here is calling on us to treat everyone as a beloved family and friend
4. Again, not in the sense of pandering, but in the sense of looking for the good and seeking to call that forth, possibly even by setting boundaries
5. And if you want a really clear image of what happens when we start treating people as enemies, it leads to an attitude that “has regard for itself alone, and for others scarcely as human beings, whom at heart it values less than it does its horses and dogs.” Ouch!

VII. Here's another powerful teaching about how to think about others

- A. “Internal people, as the angels of heaven are, do not wish to retaliate to evil by evil, but from heavenly charity they forgive freely. For they know that the Lord protects all who are in good from the evil, that He protects according to the good with them, and that He would not protect if on account of the evil done to them they should burn with enmity, hatred, and revenge, for these drive away protection. Angels do not fight with the evil, much less do they return evil for evil, but they allow it to be done, since they are protected by the Lord, and therefore no evil from hell can do them harm.” (AE 556:9)
- B. The protection and safety of the angels lies not in defending themselves from external harm, but in protecting their souls from harm by ensuring that they do not match hate with hate.
- C. We can't always avoid external protecting and striving, nor should we
- D. But part of the reason we pray for those who have hurt us is to protect our own souls from being dragged into hell because of what others do.
- E. Maybe you are going to walk away today asking what do you actually do with all this teaching, and this is possibly the key idea: Don't worry about how you treat the person in front of you. Worry about making sure that you don't have hate in your heart because that absence allows the Lord to be present

VIII. When He is present, we can love, bless, and pray for those who have hurt us

- A. Here's an example in the Psalms of doing what the Lord says:
- B. “Fierce witnesses rise up.... They reward me evil for good, to the sorrow of my soul. But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth; I humbled myself with fasting; and my prayer would return to my own heart. I paced about as though he were my friend or brother; I bowed down heavily, as one who mourns for his mother.” (Ps 35:11-14)

IX. When we do this, we benefit, and others do. Our reading from Luke ended this

way: “Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.”

- A. When we offer mercy and forgiveness to others we receive it from the Lord, and I think it’s safe to say we all need that rather badly
  - B. So you could ask who is your worst enemy now? Who would you be happiest were you to find out that person was hurt or humiliated or forcefully shown the error of their ways?
    - 1. What would it take for you to offer mercy or forgiveness or compassion?
- X. A passage in Exodus reads like this: “If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again. If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, and you would refrain from helping it, you shall surely help him with it.” (Ex 23:4-5)
- A. This teaching offers the spirit of the Lord’s message. That person still feels like an enemy, but you will not inflict harm on them and theirs because if it
    - 1. You have compassion on the overburdened donkey because that’s what good people do – they try to help those who are suffering
  - B. New Church teaching says that enemy here means people who have “a different idea of what the good and truth of faith are” (AC 9255). Most specifically this applies to religious differences, but it could also apply in a lesser way to politics, thoughts on how to deal with Covid, the different ways your siblings raised their children, or the different ways friends do church
  - C. We need to look to help out, to make a difference, to seek their good. Bring back your enemy’s ox
- XI. Let’s look at this issue from the Lord’s perspective a bit more, because when we feel righteous anger toward an enemy we may be unconsciously thinking the Lord is on our side, and if an enemy suffers, it may feel that justice has been done
- A. Yet the Lord says, “‘As I am alive,’ says the Lord Jehovih, ‘I have no delight in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn back from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways! For why will you die, O house of Israel?’” (Ez 33:11)
    - 1. The Lord wants nobody to suffer, to burn, not even the worst person
    - 2. And this may explain why He allows things to continue on in this world when we get impatient. He does not act when we feel a need to punish or hate
    - 3. We see an enemy and want retribution, justice, sometimes even suffering
    - 4. He sees a soul in want of salvation and chooses patience
    - 5. So we can look at the world and say it’s not fair, and sometimes it isn’t
      - a. But in reality if we look deeper, our impatience and hate are unfair
  - B. So the Lord says, “But the sons of your people say, ‘The way of the Lord is not fair’ but as for them, their way is not fair. When the just turns back from his justice, and does perversity, he shall even die thereby. But if the wicked

turns back from his wickedness, and does judgment and justice, thereby he shall live. But you say, 'The way of the Lord is not fair.' O house of Israel, I will judge you, each person according to his ways." (Ez 33:17-20)

- C. We look at the deep enemies – the hateful dictator, the child trafficker – and want results now. The Lord wants salvation, and He wants the same for us
  - D. And so He says don't hate. That's what will destroy your soul. This enemy won't
  - E. Since we can't see the long term view the Lord has in mind, all we can do is trust Him and choose not to hate as He does His work
  - F. Consider this passage about the Lord's mercy: "The Lord's mercy is infinite and will not let itself be limited to the few who are inside the Church. Instead it reaches out to all in the whole wide world." (AC 1032:2-3)
    - 1. Think about that image of the Lord refusing to let His mercy be limited, refusing to let hate or despair rule the day, refusing to favor the in-crowd at the expense of others
- XII. "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also.... But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.... But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.... For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.

But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. And just as you want people to do to you, you also do to them likewise. But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you. (Luke 6:27-38)

Charity consists essentially in desiring the welfare of one's neighbor, in having an affection for what is good, and in acknowledging that since what is good is one's neighbor, those who are governed by good are consequently one's neighbor, but varyingly so, depending on the amount of good that governs the individual person. Therefore since charity consists in having an affection for what is good, it also consists in feelings of mercy for those in distress. The good of charity holds such feelings within it because it comes down from the Lord's love towards the whole human race, a love which is 'mercy' because the whole human race is in distress. Mercy sometimes seems to exist among the evil who have no charity. But this is a case of pain because of their own suffering; for it consists in a concern for friends whom they identify with themselves, and when those friends suffer, they suffer too. This kind of mercy is not the mercy that belongs to charity but that which goes with friendship based on self-interest, which regarded in itself is the opposite of mercy. That kind of person despises and hates everyone else apart from himself, and so everyone else apart from the friends whom he identifies with himself. (AC 5132:2)

A person has charity and mercy who exercises justice and judgment by punishing the evil and rewarding the good. There is charity in punishing the evil, for to this are we impelled by our zeal to amend them, and at the same time to protect the good, lest these suffer injury at the hands of the evil. In this way does a person consult the welfare of one who is in evil, or his enemy, and express his good feeling toward him, as well as to others, and to the common weal itself; and this from charity toward the neighbor. AC 2417:7