

Epiphany 7 Yc 25 Homily

Unfortunately, I can't stand for too long, so I'm tendered, and I'm grateful for the measure I received from Father Bruce. I hope I don't have to do that for him, though. Have you ever really disliked somebody? Have you ever hated anybody? Have you ever wanted to get your own back on somebody? Well, that's a temptation to which we're all subject.

We think hard thoughts about other people, because we think they think hard thoughts about us. We think that sometimes people really are out to get us. And we have a great deal of trouble holding back and not saying something to them.

Saying, we know you're losing grievance against me, I know you don't like our family. Really? Do people think like that? Well, sometimes I listen to conversations on the train, and it's fortunately the young people who tend to talk like that. Oh, I'm going to get my own back on him.

Oh, I'm put up with that. No, I'll get my own back. Well, is that what's happening in the world? Are the Russians trying to get their own back on the poor old folk who live on the bottom part of the Rus'? Well, maybe, because there was a point at which they were defeated, the Russians were defeated, and they've nursed a grievance ever since.

Hate, dislike, desire to get your own back. They're the besetting sins of humanity. We always feel that we're owed more than we receive.

We want to get our own back. We will get our own back. To that, Jesus says, love your enemies.

Love your enemies. Can you really love your enemies? Did people who were fighting each other in two huge world wars we had, did they ever think of loving each other? Well, there were times when the fight was lessened. There were times, indeed, when Christmas in the First World War, when the fighting stopped, and the Germans and the British and the other allied people got together and celebrated Christmas.

Goodness, can we imagine that sort of thing happening now? No, the form of war has changed, and the so-called laws of war are rarely observed. Everyone is out to get everyone else. We want to kill them, we want to lay them low, we want to decimate them.

And we're like that also in our own society. We are living in evil times. We're living in evil times because we ourselves have given way to ungracious, unkind thoughts about others.

We want to get our own back. We want to be triumphant. We want to win.

Well, that's not what Christianity is about. That's not what Jesus taught, and it's not the way in which the world will ever advance. But how can we move on from being people who are self-concerned, self-willing, and self-righteous? We always think we're right.

No, we think that we are deserved better than we receive. We think that others should give way to us. And that, of course, is not how Jesus would have us live.

How should Jesus, how would Jesus have us live? Well, it's there. In that Sermon on the Plain, which is Luke chapter 6, as opposed to the Matthew Sermon on the Mount, we find the same sentiments anyway. We are called to love those whom we don't like.

We're called to face ourselves as people who are much less than perfect, and who get what we deserve in some ways. The idea of the law, which covers all of humanity, has been something which human beings have sought for years, for generations, for decades, for centuries. The earliest forms of law in regard to groups in society is the Code of Hammurabi.

Do you know the Code of Hammurabi? Do you? Well, crudely, it's get them before they get you. If somebody were to hit you, you hit them back. If somebody were to be unkind to you, be unkind back to them.

That is no way to live in the Christian dispensation. And we have an incredible job always to remember that if we believe in a loving and merciful God, and we are called also to be loving and merciful, we must seek to display love, mercy, and true justice in all we do. It is all but impossible for most of us to live like that all the time.

We give way. I know that sometimes I feel very irritated with people, and when I feel that, I know that I'm in the wrong. People do wrong things to each other.

They do it because we are sinful creatures. They're not fully involved. We don't take notice of what God would have us be.

We are people of dust. We are people of dishonor. We don't care about others when we should.

We don't love others as we should. We're too concerned with our own way and getting our own way. And as the Lord says in that passage from Luke, that long sermon on the plain, the way we should live is to offer something different to others.

I say to you that, listen, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer their help also, and from anyone who takes away your coat, do not throw even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you, and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again.

Well, it's hard to conceive that we should be as kind and as understanding towards other people as those words of the Lord would have us. We have to face things in life about ourselves. We have to face things that we are always less than perfect.

We can be different. We can be better. We can forgive others when we think they've wronged us.

We can ask their forgiveness if they think we have wronged them. We move towards others in the light of the love the Lord has disclosed to us in Christ. We're called to try to be perfect.

We're called to embrace others even in the midst of their rejection of us and our wanting to reject them. God calls us to be more than we know ourselves to be. For God is a loving and merciful God.

God is a forgiving God. God is about love. God is love.

And we in turn must seek to mirror that love in all we say and do, in every way we act. It's hard to live a full Christian life. Of course it is.

But that's no reason why we shouldn't try. That's no reason why we shouldn't accept what God has done for us in Jesus and what he calls us to do for each other. God is a loving and forgiving God.

He is a caring God. He is an accepting God. And just as he accepts us, we in turn must accept that others will frequently be less than the perfect people we want them to be and that we ourselves will be often far less than perfect.

We will be unforgiving at times. That's no way to live. We must seek to in all things serve God by moving towards other people.

The world is at times a very tough place. The world is a very unforgiving place. And that doesn't stop us from being forgiving people ourselves.

It doesn't stop us from putting out our hand towards others, a hand of peace and reconciliation, making acts of love and caring fully and truly about others. The world can be a hard and a tough place. But there's no reason why we should not turn and think about this first before thinking only of ourselves.

God calls us to be loving, to be accepting, to be caring. We are not simply people of dust. We're people for whom God has given himself in his son Jesus Christ.

He has moved decisively towards us. He asked us also to move towards others. He asked us to accept the love that he gives, to accept the forgiveness he offers.

If Christianity as a religion is about anything, it is about forgiving. It is about understanding. It is about moving towards the other, the other human being in love and acceptance and forgiveness.

We may be people of dust, and we may behave as though we are people of dust. That is not how God would have us be. And that is not how we should be, because we know that we can be better.

We know that we can be stronger in faith because of what God has done for us in Jesus. God has forgiven us by giving himself in Jesus Christ, perfect man, perfect God. So, as we move towards the beginning of the season of Lent, we thank God who moves towards us, who has decisively moved towards us, and who has not spared himself, but in Jesus has given up himself and caused us to do the same with our sisters and brothers in the world.

Praise to God for the love he has shown to us. Praise to God for the love that he has given to us. Praise to God for the way in which he calls us to love and care for each other.

May, as we begin the season of Lent shortly, may we understand the nature of God, God who does not spare himself, but in Jesus gave himself and calls us to do the same for each other, because he is a loving and forgiving God, because we are people who have called to believe and work decisively in the world for each other. Just as there are people hating and fighting each other and have for generations in between each other, that is no excuse for us not to have a good, hard look at ourselves and to know that we can be better than we know ourselves to be, that we can be stronger in love and faith as we work for justice and goodness in this world. May God strengthen us as we move towards the season of Lent.

May God strengthen us that we may truly worship him in peace and love. God strengthen us that we may love and serve each other, because we are the children of God and the brothers and sisters of each other. Amen.

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