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Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time - 19 February 2023

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19 February 2023

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reflection by Joe Tedesco

Introduction

Today we hear a continuation of Jesus' engagement with the Law of Moses. We will be entering into Lent in coming weeks and leave the Sermon on the Mount behind, but we carry the call to 'be holy' with us, recognising that holiness is not a purely spiritual exercise nor holding to objective arbitrary law. Holiness is founded in God's love and in love of others.

Penitential Act

Use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus, you reveal the wisdom of God. Lord have mercy.

You are the perfection of God. Christ have mercy.

You came to draw us to the Father. Lord have mercy.

Collect

The oration

Grant, we pray, almighty God,

that, always pondering spiritual things,

we may carry out in both word and deed

that which is pleasing to you.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,

who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

God, for ever and ever.

The collect for Sunday 7 has been long cherished and utilised in a variety of contexts across a wide range of missals. The first appearance of the oration is for when there is dissent and dispute in a monastery. The text is also closely related to the prayer for Sunday 4, and perhaps reaches back to the contentious situations addressed in the Mass prayers composed by Pope Gelasius (d. 496). The content of the prayer has remarkable simplicity and richness. The oration petitions God for the grace to meditate always on spiritual things. The collect for Sunday 4 expresses this same thought when it refers to love that is 'true of heart'. These opening lines reflect

a dynamic of continuous, unceasing prayer and reflection upon the divine mandates, a practice extolled in the psalms. From this point the prayer moves to the qualities of our speech and our deeds. The meaning of the prayer is that the whole life of the community, contemplative reflection and prayer first, but communication and action as well, be taken up in what is pleasing to God. It is concerned with the integrity of the faith, deeds and worship of the Christian community before God. The context of dissent in a monastic community highlights that the presence of disharmony serves notice to the community that they have acted and spoken in ways that are not pleasing to God and consequently have undermined the integrity of their faith, worship and love of neighbour.

Acknowledgement

The discussion of the collect, slightly adapted, was composed by Gerard Moore for the Canadian liturgical journal *Celebrate!* (Novalis Press). Our thanks to them for permission to reuse the material.

First Reading

Leviticus 19:1–2, 17–18

The text from Leviticus prefigures the teachings of Jesus – how we treat our brothers and sisters is fundamental to the whole Law.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 103(102):1–4, 8, 10, 12–13. R. v. 8

The Lord is kind and merciful.

Today's Psalm is a reminder that the foundation of loving others rests first in God's constant mercy shown toward us.

Second Reading

1 Corinthians 3:16–23

The repeated theme that we have heard from Corinthians in recent weeks continues; God's wisdom far supersedes human wisdom. This week, Paul focusses on how we are called to unity in such wisdom. Being a family that belongs to Christ is the only source of self-importance that matters.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 5:38–48

The first chapter of the Sermon on the Mount finishes with a call to a life mirroring the perfection of God.

Reflection

Any parent or anyone close to families of parents with young children would likely have witnessed the process of a child attempting to take their first steps. All children are different and begin walking at different times and with various methods of getting there. I recall one of my own children was a good crawler, but not so interested in walking. My wife and I were not particularly worried, but at some point we started, like many parents in similar situations, attempting to help our child learn the basic skill of walking through various forms of enticement and encouragement. It was relatively slow going, she might stand occasionally, happy to lean on items and waddle along on her feet, so we knew she had the basic ability. However, she just didn't seem interested in taking that jump of letting go of any support, standing on her own strength and taking those steps.

This changed quite quickly one day when spending a weekend away with some friends. Among them was a young toddler about a year older than my child. They delighted in each other's company and suddenly, with the older toddler friend running around having fun, my own child was drawn to get up and do the same. Where our parental enticements didn't seem to work, a relatively short time with my daughter's walking friend drew her up and on her legs, attempting and quickly succeeding in joining the run around play with the older child. Of course, my daughter was not perfect. Not even close, she was wobbly and up and down all weekend as she worked it all out.

The point is, that sometimes we need that enticing experience that seems a bit out of reach to help us recognise what we are capable of – and something of that is happening in today's Gospel message. In it we hear a continuation of the high standard of life that Jesus is calling his followers to.

However, it is helpful to recognise a couple of things. Firstly, the 'perfection' that Christ's followers are being called to is God's first. It is 'perfect' because it is God's ways. Such a statement can cause us to assume a mutual exclusivity; if it's God's ways, it cannot possibly be our way in an identical manner. It is simply beyond us. Perhaps part of today's scripture message is that teachings such as turning the other cheek and love of enemies might seem beyond us, however, that does not make it utterly impossible, at least from God's perspective.

Like the story of my daughter learning to walk, in one sense, it would seem silly to have told my crawling daughter to "walk perfectly as your earthly father walks". It would make no sense on the face of it; however, my statement is reasonable in another sense in that she was going to be capable of it in due time and I could see her potential where she could not. It's hard to know the mind of a young child, but when considering my daughter on the edge of toddlerhood, she probably didn't realise that she could walk and certainly she wasn't aware that she could do all the things she can do now as a young woman – running, jumping, athletic activities of all kinds. When she saw what she was capable of in a mode that made sense and motivated her, she was indeed able to take steps (in more ways than one) in that direction.

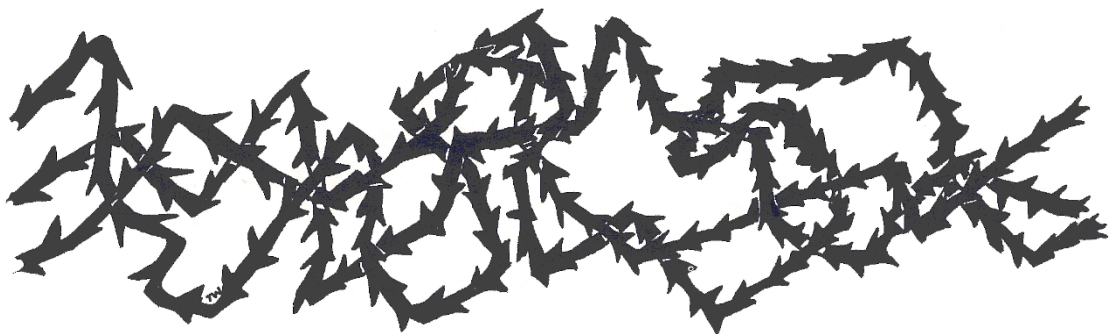
So, we too hear the call of the perfect life, but we also draw on the witness of the scriptures, great men and women of the faith, and people near and far who can encourage us to join in the journey toward the perfection of Christ. Such sources show us the joy of such a life in our reality.

This leads to another important point; we are called to be perfect not as a matter of being inerrant or infallible in the total sense of the term. Such a thing is evidently not the experience of the world we currently live in. Rather, it is a direction we're supposed to be heading in. A model of being, illustrated in the person of Christ, to show us what we are actually capable of. That we can stretch and move from moral infancy to moral maturity.

We tend to think of the Christian life, especially its moral dimensions, as either on or off, right or wrong, black or white – perfect or imperfect. However, we must remember that the Christian life is just that, a life, a dynamic existence in motion. We are a pilgrim church after all. The call to 'be perfect' is not a static state that we either are or are not. Only God can claim to have a perfect state of being. We, on the other hand, are being called to form ourselves in the image of the Perfect.

The call to 'be perfect' should not be equated to perfectionism. Jesus' teaching of the 'higher life' should not be used as a verbal cudgel on ourselves or each other. It is an expression of who God is and what God ultimately wants. It is a reminder that, through Jesus Christ our Lord, we have a sense in what our purpose ultimately is. We may feel like we're fumbling around, well short of the spiritual maturity that such high standards entail, but we're more capable than we think, it is possible. We should hear Jesus' words today as a loving reminder of what our true selves is capable of, even if we feel distant from it.

Moreover, we need not run before we crawl, toddle, or walk. Wherever we are at is where God will meet us, giving us vision of the next step on the way. Jesus will call us to the 'perfect way' but will meet us in our 'imperfect reality'. In this imperfect reality, we can hear the voice of God in our prayer, in our sacramental life, and in people around us that will draw us closer to the perfection of God.



PRAY FOR THOSE WHO PERSECUTE YOU. Mt 5:44

Prayer of the Faithful

Introduction

The Psalmist reminds us that all good things come from the kindness and mercy of God. With faith in such kindness and mercy we bring our needs in prayer.

Petitions

We pray for the leaders of our Church throughout the world as they walk together in faith towards the celebration of the Synod on Synodality. May this be fruitful for all the People of God.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for the political and economic leaders of the world. May their hearts be open to the mercy of God so that their work bring economic and political justice in these difficult times of war, climate change and recession.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those at the beginning of life and those at the end of their natural lives. May their worth as creatures made in the image of God be respected and supported by all who care for them.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who are sick, mentally or physically. May they be supported by caring hands in the medical profession and with compassion by their family and friends.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for our community that in our work or study at home and in the world may be fruitful and a beacon of light for those around us.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who mourn that they will be comforted and those who have died that they be welcomed into the kingdom of God.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

Conclusion

God of love, we offer you these needs and the needs as yet unspoken in our hearts with the full knowledge and confidence that you hear our prayer. We ask this through the power of the Spirit and in the name of Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

Title	AOV1	AOV2	AOVK	GA	CWB	CWBII	S&S1	S&S2
A new commandment				318	615	443		
All creatures of our God and King (Recessional)				395	618	446		
All people that on earth do dwell	25			533	613	448		
Eye has not seen	146			466				
Father of mercy, God of consolation					670			
Forgive our sins as we forgive					680	120		
For the fruits of all creation				426		488		
God gives his people strength					691			
I heard the voice of Jesus say	54			468		512		
In Christ there is no east or west					721	519		
Joyful, joyful we adore You						528		
Lord of all nations, grant me grace						542		
Lord, whose love in humble service					741	551		
Love divine, all loves excelling				463	740	552		
Make me a channel of your peace		126		490	793	555		
No greater love				460		622		
O breathe on me, O breath of God				432	758	564		
Praise, my soul, the king of heaven	78				789	588		
Praise to the Lord		132			792	586		
The Church's one foundation				484	819	614		
The Church of Christ, in every age					818	613		
The gift of the Holy Spirit					823	112		
The Lord is kind and merciful (Modlin)							77	
The Lord is kind and merciful (Booth)								274
The servant song		169		487				
There's a wideness in God's mercy					838	624		
This is my will my one command				465	842	626		
To live like Jesus			160					
Ubi caritas (Chant)				319		639		
Ubi caritas (Taize)				324		633/634		
We live and love your word			118			571		
Where there is charity and love				323	863	638		
Where true charity is dwelling						639		

Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 102: *The Lord is kind and merciful.*

	CWB	GA	JOBA	LPA	PM
Psalm 102	336	61	pg. 62	pg. 94	pg. 78