

7 Sunday B – Fr. Val Handwerker

February 19, 2017

Cathedral

5:00 10:00 Noon

Theme: No doormats on Jesus' team, but rather those who love to the end

Why follow someone who teaches us to be a bunch of doormats and wimps? (1)

Yes, it's a tough world out there. There are deep divisions. We all know it. And the other guys don't play by the same noble standards of Jesus.

Friends: We're in the middle of Jesus' greatest sermon, his Sermon on the Mount. **"But I say to you,"** With authority Jesus lays down the gauntlet determining who really are his disciples, and not just his fans...**"But I say to you: Offer no resistance to one who is evil...Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go two miles."**

In Jesus' life and ministry, his people were under foreign occupation. They knew what it felt like to be under someone's thumb. It irritated their last nerve when some Roman soldier would just pluck them out of the crowd and order them to carry his backpack for a mile. **"You go two miles,"** Jesus tells us disciples. Now it's strict Roman law that soldiers could only make folks carry their baggage just one mile. Going two miles...well, it just might get that soldier in trouble with his commanding officer. "Going that extra mile," so the saying goes. As we come toward the end of Black History month, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., carried out Jesus' teaching literally, creatively ever pushing the envelope of non-violence in order to tear off the scab of injustice.

But we have to do so with love. That's the part which really makes me cringe.

Listen again to Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount: **"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."**

It's our central symbol—the *cross*: The cross shows that Jesus put flesh on what he teaches here. *He* took his words literally, and in his Sermon on the Mount he charges us to show his Lordship in every aspect of our lives.

“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

I just want to stay away from those folks...those for whom I feel angry...those who, in my judgment, do me wrong.

Pray for them, Jesus instructs us...Don't just put up with them: *love* them.

Years ago, when I was having a tough time with this, a spiritual counselor advised me to do something each day. I call it my “resentment maintenance list.” Each morning—as I put lather on my face to shave—I list all those who have been—or are—on my resentment list. I pray for them by name. I pray that they have all the joy in life that I want for myself—for that 24-hour-period. **“Pray for your enemies...love them,”** so Jesus instructs us. You know, we have a button here that, if I push it, all the lights in the Cathedral go out. I wish that there were some grace that could extinguish my resentment and anger all at once—like that button. I haven't found it yet. I can, however, pray that I forgive and love those with whom I'm at odds—well, for twenty-four hours. Then, the next morning I ask for that grace again—just for the day.

Sisters and brothers: It's a tough line-up in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. **“Offer no resistance to one who is evil...Love, and pray, for your enemies.”** We're not called to be doormats. We're called to be Jesus' disciples...living so one day at a time. By grace...one day at a time.

(1) See Dennis Hamm, S.J., for this expression and for his background to “going the extra mile,” in “Let the Scriptures Speak” (7th Sunday in Ordinary Time—February 19, 2017) @www.deaconsil.com.