



Bible Study Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time A

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Parishes

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“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...” Matt. 5:43-44 NABRE

Reading I: Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18

Bless More and Curse Less! The celebrated basketball coach John Wooden was known to live by the following code of conduct: “Be true to yourself, help others, make each day a masterpiece, make friendship a fine art, drink deeply from good books – especially the Bible, build a shelter against a rainy day, give thanks for your blessings and pray for guidance every day.”

Living up to this standard of conduct requires that we wish God’s goodness on others and act to make God present in their lives. We are made in God’s image and likeness. God’s character is “holy”. He gives us that character of holiness. Our nature therefore is to bless rather than to curse.

The focus of these verses from Leviticus is the



Love your neighbor as yourself! But what if my neighbor discriminates against me?

holiness of God and the holiness of Israel (vv. 1-2). Israel is holy because God is holy. In the ancient world nations worshiped gods that they fashioned in human likenesses. But Israel worshiped God, who made them in His likeness, that is, holy. How would Israel remain holy? By blessing others with their actions in what is called the "Holiness Code," (vv. 17-26). This code contained a list of specifics, beginning with a partial summary of the Ten Commandments, including the commands to revere one’s parents, keep the Sabbath and avoid idolatry (vv. 3-4). Grudges, hatred and reprisals were prohibited. Only love was permitted. God justifies His command with Himself: "I am the LORD" (v. 18). Israel was to imitate the holiness of God by blessing others with love and kindness and not exclude others with hatred and grudges. Because Israel had taken on the identity of Yahweh, they had to bless more and curse less. **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** Do you love your neighbor as yourself? Then who is your neighbor?

BLESSING IN SCRIPTURE

A blessing is the act of declaring, or wishing, God’s favor and goodness upon others. The blessing is not only the good effect of words; it also has the power to bring them to pass. In the Bible, important persons blessed those with less power or influence. The patriarchs pronounced benefits upon their children, often near their own deaths (Gen 49:1-28). Even if spoken by mistake, once a blessing was given it could not be taken back (Gen 27).

Leaders often blessed people, especially when getting ready to leave them. These included Moses (Deut 33), Joshua (22:6-7), and Jesus (Luke 24:50). Equals could bless each other by being friendly (Gen 12:3). One can also bless God, showing gratitude to Him (Deut 8:10) in songs of praise (Ps 103:1-2).

God also blesses people by giving life, riches, fruitfulness, or plenty (Gen 1:22, 28). His greatest blessing is turning us from evil (Acts 3:25-26) and forgiving our sins (Rom 4:7-8). (From Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Copyright © 1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers)

Reading II: 1 Corinthians 3:16-23

Bless More and Curse Less! The Corinthian Church was divided (see 1:10-13). What started out as a unified temple of God’s grace, emerged as a fractured, partisan group who identified with a teacher of the Word of God, rather than with God’s Word. Like Moses in the first reading, St. Paul reminds them that they are God’s people and not the product of any apostle or preacher who taught them the Gospel. He reminds them that they are Temples of the Holy Spirit.

Both pagans and Jewish converts to Christianity recognized the place of worship, the temple, to be a holy place. St. Paul assures the Corinthian Christians that Christ is the foundation of their faith. He emphasizes that each person represents the Temple of God, where the Holy Spirit dwells (v. 16). Purity here is a primary concern, as is holiness. The Corinthian Church was God’s building block, but it was up to each individual Christian to build on that foundation with wisdom (vv. 10-23). **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** With whom do you identify the most in your parish? Why?

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Gospel: Matthew 5:38-48

Bless More and Curse Less! The instinctive response to personal harm is to retaliate, or to seek revenge. This can be dangerous today, since we live in a world that seems to be turning less hospitable every day. We tend to curse or retaliate against those who harm us. We often ignore the harm we do. Some intentionally harm others for personal gain. Sadly, and in some cases, we harm others for our own pleasure and enjoyment. In a sense we chose to curse or destroy our surroundings, rather than bless and revive what is around us. Has no one taught us to live and do no harm? Yes, Jesus did. In the Sermon on the Mount, which continues in the readings for this week, Jesus tells us that our world would be better if we bless, and make holy what God has given us. When God is in the center of our relationships, we bless more and curse less.

Retaliation was as common in the ancient Near East as it is among us today. Frequently it led to vendettas in which escalating vengeance continued for generations. Israel's "law of retaliation" (Lat. *lex talionis*) limited retaliation to no more than equal compensation (**Exod. 21:24; Lev. 24:19-20; Deut. 19:21**). Though Israel tended to view the law of retaliation as God's permission to take vengeance, that was never God's intention (**Lev. 19:18**). He simply wanted to protect them from excessive vengeance and to curb vendettas. The standard of conduct Jesus gives requires His followers to bless those who harm us. He requires us to give our offenders our clothes, turn the other cheek, and serve them more than they expect (**vv. 38-51**). In this way, we become a blessing in an accursed world.

The fuel of vendettas and retaliation is hatred, which is a curse. Jesus tells us to combat hate with love. Jesus quoted the Old Testament again (**Lev. 19:18**), but this time He added what was a popular teaching by rabbis, and not by Moses, that is, hate your enemies (**v. 43**). Jesus answered the popular teaching by going back to the Old Testament that commanded love for enemies (**Exod. 23:4-5**). In view of Jesus' previous emphasis on motives, the word *love* (Gr. *ἀγαπάω - αγαπαω*) probably includes emotion as well as action. "To love one's enemies, requires doing them good (**Luke 6:32-33**) and praying for them (**v. 44**). It means to, "bless more and curse less." **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** Who do you bless? How do you bless? Who do you curse? How do you curse them?

PRAY ABOUT IT!

Monday

Read Gen 12:2. How can you be a blessing to others?

Tuesday

Read Hebrews 13:15. Bless yourself as you confess the holy name of Jesus.

Wednesday

Read Matt. 5:38-48. Be a peacemaker today.

Thursday

Read Mat. 10:13. Give your household a blessing of peace.

Friday

Read James 3:10 Tame your tongue. Attend Mass and receive the Eucharist.

CURSE

A curse is a prayer for injury, harm, or misfortune to befall someone. Noah, for instance, pronounced a curse on Canaan (**Gen 9:25**). Isaac pronounced a curse on anyone who cursed Jacob (**Gen 27:29**). The soothsayer Balaam was hired by Balak, king of Moab, to pronounce a curse on the Israelites (**Num 22-24**). Goliath, the Philistine giant of Gath, "cursed David by his gods" (**1 Sam 17:43**).

In Bible times, a curse was considered to be more than a mere wish that evil would befall one's enemies; it was believed to possess the power to bring about the evil the cursor spoke. In the account of the temptation and Fall, God Himself is described as cursing the serpent (**Gen 3:14-15**), as well as the ground (**Gen 3:17**). Although the word curse is not used directly of Adam and Eve, the woman is sentenced to pain in childbirth and the man is condemned to earn his living by the sweat of his face. In the New Testament, Jesus cursed the fig tree, saying, "'Let no fruit grow on you ever again.' And immediately the fig tree withered away" (**Matt 21:19; Mark 11:14**). He also taught Christians how to deal with curses: "Bless those who curse you" (**Luke 6:28**). (From Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Copyright © 1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers)

Resources: Matthew, Daniel J. Harrington; Collegeville Bible Commentary, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville Minn., p. 870- 871; *Living Liturgy Spirituality, Celebration, and Catechesis for Sundays and Solemnities Year A 2017*, Joyce Zimmerman, C. PP. S. Kathleen Harmon, S.N.D. de N., Christopher W. Canlon, S. M. Liturgical Press Collegeville, Mn. pp. 66-68; Scripture texts in this work are taken from the *New American Bible, revised edition* © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C. and are used by permission of the copyright owner. All Rights Reserved. No part of the New American Bible may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner.
<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/blessings.html#TYfWpVE>

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