

## 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time Year C

1 Sam 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23

Ps 103:1-4, 8, 10, 12-13

1 Cor 15:45-49

Luke 6:27-38

The first reading is from the first book of Samuel. Hopefully, it is a familiar story to you so that you know the context. If not, here is the context: Saul is the king of Israel. The person, David, that we hear about is the future king of Israel. David also is the son-in-law of King Saul. Saul became jealous of David because of David's victories at battle and his immense popularity with the people. Saul has become so jealous that he feels threatened that the people will want to make David the king, and he wants to kill David. Saul and his men have chased David all over the desert trying to kill him. Then we get to this story that we heard in our first reading. David sneaks into the camp of Saul at night when everyone is asleep. David has the chance to kill Saul, and stop being persecuted. However, as we heard David spares the life of Saul. He doesn't take revenge and kill him. The first reading ends before we find out that Saul repents because David has spared his life. Saul decides not to continue to try to kill David. He goes home and leaves David alone. Reconciliation has occurred to some extent.

As I have mentioned several times the first reading at Mass is connected in some way to the Gospel reading. It should be quite clear what the connection is today. Jesus tells His disciples in what is known as the Sermon on the Plain that, "love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you." This would have been a very challenging message to the people of Jesus' time. The Israelites had been taught, "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." (Ex 21:22-25) Of course, this meant that someone had permission to take revenge on another person that had harmed them in some way. The person that was harmed could harm the other person in an equal amount. This was to prevent someone taking excessive revenge on another. It is human nature to want to seek excessive revenge on another that has harmed us. God was trying to prevent seeking excessive revenge by only allowing an equal amount of damage done to the other person.

Now Jesus comes along and raises the standard to another level. Jesus is raising the standard to the level of the divine. We are not to seek revenge, but we are to seek forgiveness and reconciliation. Jesus said, "love your enemies and do good to them, and lend expecting nothing back; then your reward will be great and you will be children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." This is what David did by sparing the life of Saul. David could have easily killed Saul, but he didn't. He showed mercy and spared Saul's life.

This would have been a very difficult teaching for the people of Jesus' time. They were asked to change their way of thinking. Don't seek revenge. Instead forgive, bless, and pray for those that mistreat you. *This is a very difficult teaching for us today.* Yet how important is this teaching today! Look at much of what we see in society today. If someone disagrees with another person's opinion then it is quite common to vilify the person that disagrees. That person is condemned, and quite often there is an attempt to destroy that person through the media. There is very little mercy. Many people are not heeding the advice of Jesus when he said, "Stop condemning, and you will not be condemned. . . . For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you." If this saying is not clear to anyone here, then this is what it means: If you condemn someone without forgiving in this life, then God will condemn you on the Day of Judgment without forgiving you. If you constantly seek revenge when someone does you harm without showing mercy and praying for that person, then on the Day of Judgment God will not show you mercy and will treat you the same exact way that you took revenge on another.

It is human nature to become angry at a wrongdoing and want to seek revenge. We tend to return insult for insult, harm for harm. Many times we want to harm the other person far worse than they harmed us. It is as if to say, "This will show the other person not to mess with me again." However, God is calling us to something else. God is calling us to act like Him when these things happen. So, how can we act like God, especially when our first impulse is to seek revenge? The second reading gives us a clue.

St. Paul writes, "The first man, Adam, became a living being, the last Adam [Jesus] a life-giving spirit. But the spiritual was not first; rather the natural and then the spiritual. . . . Just as we have borne the image of the earthly one, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly one." St. Paul is telling us that we are human like Adam. We are subject to sin, and all that sin causes – like seeking revenge. It is through our baptism that we take on the image of the heavenly one, that is Jesus. It is through our baptism that we have the opportunity, with God's grace, to become like Jesus in all aspects of our life. Because of this gift that God has given us in baptism we are now able to forgive. We are able to love our enemies, do good to those who hate us, bless those who curse us, and pray for those who mistreat us." Does this mean that this is now easy to do? No, it doesn't. However, as we grow in God's grace we become more able to do it. As we begin to forgive little offenses, it becomes easier to forgive. As we grow in God's grace, it enables us to be able to forgive greater offenses. As we continue to grow in God's grace we become more like Jesus Himself who forgive even His enemies that crucified Him. "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." (Lk 23:34) May we become true children of the Most High, and be merciful just as our heavenly Father is merciful.