

## **02/19/2023. 7th Sunday O T Year- A (Bishop's Annual Appeal)**

Lev 19:1-2, 17-18; I Cor 3:16-23; Mt 5:38-48

Today's readings explain why Christians are expected to be holy and how we are meant to become holy people. The first reading, taken from the book of Leviticus, gives the holiness code: "Be holy, for I the Lord, your God, am holy." The Divine nature is that God is holy, and His holiness consists of His unconditional and magnanimous love, care, concern, mercy, and forgiveness towards every human being. As God's children then, that in order to be holy, we have to be kind, loving, merciful, forgiving, and compassionate toward our neighbors – and this is what God wants us to be when He calls each one of us to be holy, to be spiritually perfect.

Today's Gospel describes four ways of becoming holy people prescribed for us by Jesus using three examples of graceful Christian retaliation when people offend them and violate their rights and privileges. For Jesus, retaliation, or even limited vengeance, has no place in the Christian life, even though graceful acceptance of an offense requires great strength and discipline of character, as well as strengthening by God's grace. Jesus wants his disciples to repay evil with kindness. Instead of retaliation, Jesus gives his new law of love, grace, forgiveness, reconciliation and no retaliation.

Jesus illustrates the Christian approach by giving three examples. 1) Turn to him the other cheek: Striking someone on the right cheek requires striking with the back of one's hand, and according to Jewish concept it inflicts more insult than pain. Jesus instructs his followers to forgive the insult gracefully and convert the offender. It is interesting that Gandhi said, "Everyone in the world knows that Jesus and His teaching are non-violent, except Christians." 2) "If anyone sues you to take away your coat (chitona), let him have your cloak (himation) also": (v. 40). A chitona is a lightweight garment like a shirt (but long like a robe), worn close to the skin. A himation is an outer garment like a coat and is also long. Jesus teaches that his followers should show more responsibility and a greater sense of duty than to fight for privileges. 3) Go with him two miles. Roman law permitted its soldiers and other officials to require people to carry a burden for a mile. Service of this sort could be quite oppressive. Here, Jesus tells us that a Christian has the duty of responding, even to seemingly unjust demands by helping or serving gracefully, not grudgingly. The principle is this: When we respond to our

duty with cheerfulness rather than resentment, we may win over the one who gave us the duty.

The second part of today's Gospel passage tells us that what makes Christians different is the grace with which they treat others with loving kindness and mercy, even if they don't deserve it. Jesus commands that we are to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us to demonstrate that we are children of a merciful Heavenly Father. A Christian has no personal enemies. If we only love our family and friends, we are no different from pagans or atheists. That is, as followers of Christ and Christian community, Jesus wants love to be the answer in the face of hate and mercy in the face of unforgiveness. **Amen.**