

## Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,  
in Christ Jesus  
you challenge us to renounce violence  
and to forsake revenge.

Teach us to recognize as your children  
even our enemies and persecutors  
and to love them without measure or discrimination.

We ask this 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.

*Opening prayers* · Ordinary Time 7, Year A<sup>2</sup>

CPL • LBC Year A Proper 03.odt • 2023-03-08

<sup>2</sup> *Opening prayers : scripture-related collects for the years A, B and C from the sacramentary* / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999.

## Proper 3

*Sunday between 18 and 24 February, inclusive, if earlier than the Second Sunday before Lent; or between 24 and 28 May, inclusive, if later than Trinity Sunday* ·  
Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

### Principal Service readings

Leviticus 19.1-2,9-18	Moral and social regulations
Psalms 119.33-40	Prayer for teaching and guidance in keeping God's law
1 Corinthians 3.10-11,16-23	Building on the foundation of Jesus Christ
Matthew 5.38-48	Observing the law in your heart: be perfect

### Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,  
speak to our hearts in the stillness,  
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,  
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;  
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

### Gospel Reading

#### ***Observing the law in your heart: be perfect***

On the mountain, Jesus continued to teach his disciples. <sup>38</sup>You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” <sup>39</sup>But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; <sup>40</sup>and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; <sup>41</sup>and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. <sup>42</sup>Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

<sup>43</sup>You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.” <sup>44</sup>But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup>so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. <sup>46</sup>For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax-collectors do the same? <sup>47</sup>And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? <sup>48</sup>Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.’

## Comments and Questions

The Sermon on the Mount continues (taking up Matthew 5.1 to 7.29). The 'law of retaliation' was expressed in Exodus 21.24; Leviticus 24.20; and Deuteronomy 19.21. The aim was to keep revenge within limits and avoid escalation. Offering the 'right' cheek (5.39) indicates that the blow comes from the back of the assailant's left hand and so constitutes an insult rather than a violent assault. The setting is the personal level. The question is open about resisting evil in the social or political realm. In 5.40 the legal case is about the 'shirt' in Exodus 22.26-27: 'If ever you take your neighbour's garment in pledge, you shall restore it to him before the sun goes down; for that is his only covering.' Roman soldiers had a legal right to press civilians into service, such as when Simon of Cyrene was forced to carry the beam of Jesus' cross (27.32). Jesus urges a doubling of service. The service would probably consist of carrying baggage from one place to another. Giving alms and not seeking repayment comes from Deuteronomy 15.7-11.

There is a commandment to love one's neighbour (Leviticus 19.18) but no commandment to hate one's enemy. Jesus' teaching breaks through the limitations imposed on the objects of one's love. Much biblical and rabbinic teaching points in this direction too.

'That you may be children of your Father in heaven' (5.45), indicates motivation. The challenge is to work from a God-ward perspective of care and love for all.

The idea of God being 'perfect' (5.48) does not occur in the Old Testament. It is perhaps referencing: 'Be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy' (Leviticus 19.2; see 20.26; 21.8).

The material treated in the six antitheses (5.21-48) – murder and anger, adultery and lust, divorce, oaths, responding to evil, loving friends and enemies – remain among the most important and controversial matters for religious people,

<sup>1</sup> New Revised Standard Version Bible is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

## Quotations

**1**

Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.

Martin Luther King, Jr., 1929–1968

**2**

If you take the 'love your enemy' out of Christianity, you've 'unChristianed' the Christian faith.

Miroslav Volf, 1956–

**3**

The Bible tells us to love our neighbors, and also to love our enemies; probably because they are generally the same people.

G. K. Chesterton, 1874–1936

**4**

What is perfection in love? Love your enemies in such a way that you would desire to make them your brothers ... For so did he love, who hanging on the Cross, said 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' (Luke 23.34)

Saint Augustine of Hippo, 354–430

## Related topics

*For further study:*

Moral life; foundations of morality; beatitudes; love of God; mystery of the church; discipleship; paschal mystery; christology; reconciliation; sacrament of penance