

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 B²

Proper 3

*Sunday between 18 and 24 February inclusive, if earlier than
the Second Sunday before Lent, or Sunday between 24 and
28 May inclusive, if after 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

On observing the law

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

⁴³You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy." ⁴⁴But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵so 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. ⁴⁶For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax-collectors do the same? ⁴⁷And if you greet only your brothers

² *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.

and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.'

Matthew 5.38-48 NRSV¹

Comments and Questions

Jesus mentions the law of reciprocity in 5.38 (cf. Exodus 21.24; Leviticus 24.20; Deuteronomy 19.21), states a general principle about having an equable and unselfish temperament, and gives four examples: (1) personal insult, (2) being taken to court, (3) compelled to accompany someone, and (4) being asked for assistance. There is a need to be willing to lose one's personal rights, not to seek revenge, and to respond to evil with good.

The section on love for one's enemies is the last and most difficult of the six sections (5.21-48). Jesus begins by quoting the injunction to 'love your neighbour' (Leviticus 19.18). He does not contradict this, but goes beyond it. The Torah understands 'neighbour' as fellow Israelite, and this allows people even to define 'neighbour' in opposition to 'enemy'. However, with the broadest definition of 'neighbour' to include one's enemies (see Luke 10.29-37), no one is beyond being shown love. Enemies are not just one's personal opponents but God's opponents. In speaking about praying for one's enemies (5.44), Jesus is speaking about actions that benefit others, regardless of their attitude to you. This is being like God, who sends the rain on the just and the unjust (5.45).

It is important to look at the inner state for motivation, but is there a danger of becoming like 'thought police'? Is the teaching of Jesus impractical (5.21-48)?

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

¹ 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.

2

His power is made perfect in our weakness, and when we feel the weakest, we can overcome through Him. When the world sees that we can forgive those who hurt us, and we choose to love instead, they will know that we are truly disciples of Jesus (John 13:35).

The opposite life: unlocking the mysteries of God's upside-down kingdom
/ Alex Seeley. 2019

3

You never so touch the ocean of God's love as when you forgive and love your enemies.

Corrie Ten Boom, 1892–1983

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:

Jesus Christ – Son of Man; Jesus Christ – Messiah; healing ministry of Christ; forgiveness of sins; sacrament of anointing the sick; sacrament of reconciliation; social justice; reign of God