

# 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Year

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Our Lord has a vision of what the world can and should be. In this vision, the Kingdom of God, human beings reflect the light of God's love as in a mirror. Think how, in a lighthouse, the mirrors reflect and focus the light for the guidance and safety of seafarers. In the Sermon on the Mount St Matthew presents the point of comparison as, "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect", but St Luke focuses instead on God's compassion. "Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate." Ancient wise men had already come up with the Golden Rule: Never do to another what you would not want done to yourself. For Jesus this is not enough. It is negative. It does not reflect the positive power and energy of God's love, its depth or its tenderness.

Compassion is not about feeling sorry for people, something that can be condescending, but about sharing their feelings, taking them into our hearts. It is also more than sentimentality. It is something creative and must be shown in a practical way. To be compassionate makes demands on us, and challenges our natural instinct for self-preservation. Our Lord itemises these challenges:

- Love your enemies;
- Do good to those who hate you;
- Bless those who curse you;
- Pray for those who treat you badly;
- When slapped on one cheek – an insult – turn the other;
- If someone takes your cloak, offer your tunic too;
- Give to anyone who asks, and see what has been stolen from you as your gift;
- Do not judge, or condemn.

Real love and compassion involves concrete decisions and actions that we will find hard. Today's first reading shows us just the sort of thing Our Lord has in mind. David has saved Saul's kingdom from the Philistines, and become the best friend of the King's son, Jonathan, but Saul is driven by envy. The praise given to David has filled him with bitterness and resentment. His soldiers are seeking David to kill him. David is given a golden opportunity to save his own life, and take the crown. Abishai reacts in the way Saul himself would, "Let me pin him to the ground with his own spear." David refuses. Saul is still the King, and his best friend's father. He will show him that his fears and resentment are groundless. He takes the spear and pitcher of water, and then calls out from a distance.

Saul is not beyond redemption. Sadly, he does not grow from this experience. He continues to fight David. In the end his small-mindedness will lead him to commit suicide rather than face defeat and his own failures. Small-mindedness and pettiness are the opposite of the compassionate love of God. Some of you may have heard a current radio advert for ITV drama. It emphasises characterisation rather than a particular story. This week it focussed on 'envy'. Envy, the line goes, is more than seeing the cow in the next field giving richer milk and wanting it for oneself - it is seeing it and wanting it dead! Instead of enlarging our heart to embrace the world, we shrink the world to the size of our own heart, seeing others only from the perspective of how they impact on us. If we have no room for others, how can there be room for God?

By opening our hearts to others, we open our hearts to God. God sends us difficult, irritating people to open us up, just as the farmer ploughs the field, or you dig your garden. "Give, and there will be gifts for you: a full measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, will be poured into your lap; because the amount you measure out, is the amount you will be given back."