

7th Sunday per Annum - C
I Samuel 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23;
I Corinthians 15:45-49;
Luke 6:27-38
Little Flower - 2/24/19

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today's Gospel continues Luke's version of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

In the Old Testament, God said, "*Be holy, for I, the LORD, your God, am holy*" [Lev. 19:1]. The New Testament has two parallels to this verse: "*So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect,*" [Mt. 5:48] and "*Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful*" [Lk. 6:36]. In at least one translation, *merciful* is rendered *compassionate*. Since they are parallels, today I would like to reflect briefly on all three.

"*Be holy, for I, the LORD, your God, am holy*" [Lev. 19:1]. Many years ago, Josef Goldbrunner, a Jesuit priest and psychiatrist, wrote a little book titled *Holiness is Wholeness*. Holiness is certainly not psychological wholeness. If it were, many saints, including St. Therese, probably would not be saints. Rather, those who are holy live in right relationships with God, others, the world, and themselves. One of the biggest challenges we face today in trying to live in right relationships is balancing our relationships.

"*So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.*" This is what Matthew Kelly is talking about when he talks about becoming the-best-version-of-ourselves. Although we will never be perfect, we must constantly strive to become a better version of ourselves. We must strive to grow into the likeness of the Risen Christ. Actually, one Bible translation reads, "*In a word, you must be made perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect*" [NAB, 1970]. Although this is probably a mistranslation of the Greek, it accurately describes the reality of our situation. We are never going to be perfect as God is perfect, but we can always strive to become better than we are.

In today's Gospel, Jesus said, "*Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.*" When we think of mercy, we tend to think first of forgiveness. Certainly, when we think of God's mercy, we think of his forgiveness of our sins. However, mercy is much richer than forgiveness. Mercy in the fullest sense of the word is compassion. Therefore, "*be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate*" seems an appropriate translation. To be compassionate is to be sensitive and responsive to the real needs of others, both those spoken and those that remain unspoken.

From our perspective, it is easier to be merciful or compassionate than to be perfect. However, in the Old Testament, mercy is attributed to God and only rarely to human beings, while perfection is a goal to be sought by everyone. As Pope Francis has often said, mercy is the quality most proper to God. Therefore, we are most like God when we are merciful or compassionate.

Although Jesus' language in the Gospels is simple, his challenges are difficult. First, he challenges us to love and do good to all people whether or not they love or do good to us. It is when we love and do good to those who do not love and do good to us that we are most truly children of God who Himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Second, he calls us to stop judging and condemning others. This is probably one of his most difficult commands. If we want to be forgiven, we must forgive. Finally, he presents the Golden Rule: "*Do to others as you would have them do to you.*" The so-called Silver Rule is the reverse: "Don't do to others what you would not want them to do to you." We can be sure that if we follow these two rules, we will always do the right thing.

My brothers and sisters, in today's second reading, St. Paul tells us that rising from the dead, Jesus became a life-giving Spirit. Jesus is life giving to us. If we live the life Jesus gives us, we will grow into the likeness of the Risen Christ. We will become the-best-version-of-ourselves.