

Monday's Gospel: Breaking the Cycle of Hate

Gospel for Monday in the 11th Week of Ordinary Time, and commentary.

Gospel (*Mt 5:38-42*)

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if anyone would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; and if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to him who

begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you.”

Commentary

In today's Gospel passage, our Lord helps us realize that to be *the salt of the earth* and *the light of the world* we need to enrich justice with love. Living the law of Christ fully implies being ready to forgive, to renounce if necessary the demand that justice be applied “mathematically” when someone has harmed us.

Jesus alludes to the Old Testament law of retaliation: *an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth*. In the book of Exodus, this law is mentioned to regulate the way justice is carried out, to prevent it from becoming disproportionate revenge (cf. *Ex* 21:23–27). In seeking justice, no one could exceed the offense committed,

by charging double, or even seven or ten times more; rather the punishment should be the same as the offense. A long list of possible grievances is presented (blinding someone in one eye, hitting a slave, being gored by an ox, etc.) along with the appropriate reparation.

The solution Jesus offers us rises above all casuistry. It is the law of love, which shows us the path to achieve lasting justice. This path is one of forgiveness. Naturally, the damage done should be repaired to the extent possible. But sometimes, although the other person is repentant, they are not in a position to make reparation for all the harm they have done. And it could happen that by mercilessly demanding justice for ourselves, we lose the ability to heal the relationship and thus perpetuate a vicious cycle of hate.

Our Lord invites us to take into account each person's situation. To bring about their conversion, it will often be better to cover over their defects with the mantle of our mercy, and to continue walking patiently alongside them for however many miles it takes for them to reconsider their life and make the necessary changes.

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