

7th Sunday in Ordinary Time.

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It couldn't be simpler. Be holy. Love your enemies. The command sounds like it is just a matter of following it. No explanation needed. It has sometimes been said: if Jesus added anything to everything that existed in terms of laws and commandments, it is this: love your enemies. It is - say people today - too crazy for words, but he undoubtedly made it the focus of his preaching. It is written, then, that they thought he had gone mad. Quite understandable: after all, the mission is at odds with what we are used to. The human environment smacks of violence and hatred. Not that everyone is resigned to it, as protests against it repeat themselves. But the human lot undoubtedly preys on those who want to sow confusion. A growing economy, but more and more unhappy people, frightened and anxious in an equally growing existence insecurity.

So what does Jesus ask? To be holy? Is he a perfectionist? That can be life-threatening, because then it soon sounds, "Who can be saved then?" Constantly we have to accept that things and people are not perfect, not up to Jesus' challenge. Look at the disappointment of athletes who do not achieve what they had hoped for, for which they sometimes trained for years. Many are haunted by that reality: I can't make it. Depression is widespread, even among young people. The rising consumption of antidepressants is worrying.

Jesus, to stay in sports terms, raises the bar. His one-liners are not sloppy tweets, no, the content goes beyond the 140 characters you can summarize his mission in. It is an addition to the prevailing law: you know what has been said, I however tell you... What authority! What courage! And the opponents know: he is right. You can't argue with that, only that it is a lot to ask.

Is it an unachievable card? Not at all. Jesus' action has changed many lives, led many to repentance and deeper reflection on their doings. People have truly changed their behavior because of his proclamation, and many of his insights have become commonplace, natural elements of upbringing and formation. Love should be expressed more in deeds than in words - we know.

The law Jesus proclaims can save us from laziness. Those who read this are startled, taken out of the ordinary to become better than the mediocre. 'Ad maiora natus sum', Stanislas Kostka must have said, freely translated as 'there is more in you!' But where should we get that 'more' from? With what energy?

It requires discernment: am I capable of more? Is more rightly expected of me? But even more: am I given more than I realize, or than I actually use? The measure given is called 'perfection' - as the heavenly Father is supposed to be perfect. He Himself is the measure. But are we sons of gods then? In John's Gospel, we read that Jesus said, "Is it not written in your law, 'I have said, 'You are gods'? If what I do is not from my Father, do not believe me, but if it is and you still do not believe me, at least believe in what I do. Then you will understand that the Father is in me and that I am in the Father." We are taken into the nearness of God by doing what Jesus did. We get to participate in the divine life of Jesus, whose hallmark is all-transcending love. There is more in us.

Demonstrating love indiscriminately to each one in my vicinity. Am I capable of this? It is an ongoing quest to keep seeing the pitfalls in my thoughts and opinions. It is easier to compromise good intentions than to really give them form. We like to use excuses to excuse what is not good even in our own reflection. If we are looking for a measure of our sincerity, we should keep reading the Sermon on the Mount.

I don't think Jesus wants to make things difficult for us. Jesus wants to keep us awake, to call us to live our lives according to the measure given to us from God. In the life of the Son of God, we see where that leads. No, Jesus is not suggesting mediocrity. He calls us to be perfect - after all, that is what the Father offers him and us, what he enables us to do. We can surpass ourselves if we truly draw from God our abilities. But it remains searching, because it remains at odds with our human way of doing and thinking. But that's like in traffic: always watch out. You never know.