



LESSON ONE

RESOURCES

Go to page 18 for the link to download resources.

HANDOUT

Matthew5: 44-48

The text we are using for this first lesson is from Matthew's gospel account of the Sermon on the Mount. (Matthew: 5: 44-48.) The whole of Chapter Five of Matthew is devoted to the higher standard Jesus is asking his followers to adopt and the passage we are going to pray with is one of the most challenging of Jesus' new laws of love. So, I invite you to settle into stillness, relax and prepare to listen intently to the WORD God is giving you today.

LECTIO

Read the text from Matthew 5:44-48. Let us read it slowly, in order to prepare the soil of our hearts for new seeds and new growth. Be aware of the Holy Spirit playing on the fibres of your heart as you listen. This is the true *oratio* (prayer) of *lectio divina*.

Matthew: 5:44-48

44. But I say this to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; 45. so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, for he causes his sun to rise on the bad as well as the good, and sends down rain to fall on the upright and the wicked alike. 46. For if you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Do not even the tax collectors do as much? 47. And if you save your greetings for your brothers, are you doing anything exceptional? 48. Do not even the gentiles do as much? You must therefore be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.'

MEDITATIO

Some further background to enrich our reading, reflection and response. This text is found in the Gospel of Matthew. It extends an earlier law in Leviticus 19:18 which asked people to love members of their own national or religious group. Jesus deliberately expands the concept in a dramatic and seemingly impossible ask: “Love your enemies”. The “New Jerome Biblical Commentary” notes that “this new demand is based, not on human nature but on the example of God. It is human nature to love those who love you and to greet your friends. However, God makes the sun to rise on the good and the bad and the rain to fall on all and not just the upright, not just the faithful. Disciples of Jesus cannot put limits on their love. It has no limits, no boundaries. Our perfection is measured by our capacity to extend ourselves and allow the warmth of our love to embrace all, friend and enemy alike.”

Spend time with the text now. Ponder on it in the days ahead. Write your response in your prayer journal. I share mine in *evangelizatio*

ORATIO

This is the movement when we speak to God in response to what we have heard from the passage. We speak to God just as we would to someone who is close to us, whom we trust. If it is helpful you may wish to write your dialogue or your prayer in your prayer journal. You may even wish to draw your response. There are no rights or wrongs to this movement. Simply open your heart to God and reveal to God your thoughts emotions, fears concerns, your petitions, and your thanksgiving and praise.

CONTEMPLATIO

We are now in a position to leave behind all the thoughts and interior movements of our heart and allow ourselves to sit still in his presence as Mary of Bethany was able to do. Here we allow God to take over and we simply wait in silence, in peace, not expecting anything or initiating anything. It is God's turn now. We are not perturbed if we hear nothing or feel nothing because this is an exercise of trust. We trust that God allows whatever God chooses and we allow ourselves to be content with what is and not what we would like it to be.

RUMINATIO

We choose a word or phrase now from the passage, one that really speaks to us and which we resonate with, in readiness to carry it with us through the day and for as long as it continues to nourish us and speak to us. We may like to write it on a card and display it somewhere where we will see it frequently.

EVANGELIZATIO/ACTIO

This is the time for making decisions as to what we will DO in response to what we have heard in God's Word for us today. I share my response with you here.

My first thought is about enemies. I remember when I wrote an online retreat on forgiveness some time ago, that in their feedback quite a number of people said that they had no enemies. But as I listened to this Word today I realised that Jesus is saying that those who treat you badly are your enemies; those who hate you are your enemies.

Our enemies are not restricted to those who declare war on our country, or murder our children. They could be within our own

circle of family and friends. I realised that I need to be real about this and to refine my own definition of enemy. My decision is that I will spend time in prayer gently looking at the reality of the relationships I have in the community and honestly open up to the reality that I may have enemies and that I need not be shocked by this. Just because a person is my enemy does not necessarily mean that person is a bad person, although it could mean that. But judgment is for God not for me.

None of us is perfect. And even as God calls us to be perfect in this text he shows us what that means. Be whole and complete by showing love to not just your friends and family but also to those who treat you badly and don't like you. This is the completeness that God calls perfection and this is what God urges us to pursue.

The second challenge for me came when trying to figure out just how to love my enemies. I realised that I need to treat them in the same way that I treat my best friend in community. Yet, I ask myself if this is hypocritical? To smile warmly and do good to someone I really don't like or trust? The real challenge for me then is this: if I do treat them as I would my friend then I cannot speak negatively about them behind their back. This is what would amount to hypocrisy. So, I have to not only reach out but I also have to restrain my need to judge, condemn, gossip and criticize after I reach out. I once heard the saying that if you want to get rid of your "enemy" make them your friend. Perhaps this is how we do it.

I have decided that I need the Sacrament of Reconciliation to give me the grace I need to move toward this action. It can

only be done with the help of the Holy Spirit. My task is to ask for that help and to be open to believing it is there; and to receive it in deep trust and thanksgiving.

REFLECTION

Click the link on p18 to watch “Love your Enemies”

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