

Dear friends,

During a goodwill visit to France, **Nikita Khrushchev**, a former Russian dictator, said he admired many of Jesus' teachings. But he also said he disagreed with some of the teachings of Jesus.

For example, he didn't agree with Jesus' teaching "to turn your cheek when someone wrongs you".

"If someone wrongs me," said Khrushchev, "I won't turn my cheek. I will hit the other guy back so hard that his head may fall off."

In today's Gospel Jesus says, "Whoever **has** my commandments and observes **them** is the one who loves me."

There are **three** ways we can look upon the difficult task of keeping the commandments of Jesus.

First: as a **Restriction** to our Freedom-Something we **have** to do. Second: as a **guide** to our growth-Something we **should** do. Third: as an **Invitation** to Love-Something we should **want** to do.

For example, take Jesus' commandment to "**turn the other cheek.**"

First, we can look upon this commandment as a '**Restriction to our freedom**'.

It is something we hate to do, but we have to do. It is something we would rather get out of doing.

When we look upon Jesus' commandment to "turn the other cheek" as merely as an unpleasant restriction - something we would like to get out of.

We can become angered by it and even resent it, saying,

"Why forgive our enemies? Why not show them they can't push us around? Why not adopt the attitude of Nikita Khrushchev?"

This brings us to the **second** way that we can look upon the commandment of Jesus. We can look at them as "**Guides**" to our growth.

Again, take Jesus' commandment "to forgive our enemies".

Several years ago, the American Medical Association surveyed several thousand general practitioners. They asked these doctors this question:

What percentage of people that you see in a week have needs that you feel qualified to treat with your medical skills?

The answers to that question were amazing. The doctors responded that they felt qualified to treat only about 10 percent of their patients.

When questioned about the other 90 percent, the doctors said that these patients suffered from real pain.

But their problem wasn't a chemical or physical one; it was psychological. In other words, it was a "Life Problem" that defied normal medical treatment.

The real causes of their illness were things like anger, pent-up hostilities, loneliness, negative feelings, or destructive lifestyles. These are problems the normal doctor is not trained or equipped to handle.

Commenting on the effect these things have on health, Bruce Larson writes:

"Our feelings about ourselves and others and the quality of our relationships may have more to do with how often we get sick, than our genes, chemistry, and diet."

"Doctors are quick to admit that there is little in their medical training to equip them to help patients with these "life problems."

The point is that when we hold a grudge, refuse to forgive, or seek revenge, we hurt ourselves as much as we hurt our enemy.

In short, Jesus' commandment '**to forgive enemies**' is not merely a Restriction to our freedom; it is a **Guide** to our health and welfare.

Finally, we can look upon Jesus's commandment in yet a **third** way "**as an Invitation to love.**"

This is the way Jesus proposes in today's gospel "If you love me, you will obey my commandments."

Jesus presents His commandments as opportunities to express our love for him.

Therefore, we can look upon Jesus' commandment as a **Restriction** to our freedom, something we have to do; As a **Guide** to our growth, something we should do; or as an **Invitation** to love, something we want to do.

This is the challenge today's gospel sets before each one of us- "if you love me, you will obey my commandments".

Let us close by paraphrasing the words of Harry Emerson Fosdick:

"Fear tends to paralyze, love releases.

Fear imprisons, love frees.

Fear sours, love sweetens.

Fear wounds, love heals.

Fear avoids, love invites."