

Homily for the 7th Sunday in Ordinary Time
St. Francis of Assisi Church – Belchertown, Massachusetts
Fr. Jack Sheaffer
February 24, 2019



Scripture Readings: 1 Samuel 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-22 ✕ Psalm 103:1-4, 8, 10, 12-13 ✕ Luke 6:27-38

Sister of St. Joseph Mary McGlone tells a story that took place back when she was a sophomore in high school. She and her fellow students had a teacher that year who was very hard on them and who many of them didn't particularly like. One day she complained to her mother about the teacher; her mom told her that Mary needed to pray for the teacher.

A few days later, Mary once again complained to her mom and her mom asked if she was praying for the teacher. Mary said she was, but her mom looked at her with raised eyebrows. So, Mary continued, saying, "[It's] nearly impossible but, yes, I am praying for her... to have a happy death before the end of the semester." Her mom told her that wasn't exactly what she had in mind.¹

The words of Jesus in today's Gospel reading are really hard to take, and even harder to follow. He asks us to love our enemies, to do good to those who hate us, to bless those who curse us, to pray for those who mistreat us.² Really? Even the saintliest among us must struggle with this teaching; it goes against normal human reactions to horrible and unfair treatment by others. Does Jesus want us to be abused? Does He want us to reward bad behavior? The logical and faithful answer is, of course, "No." So, what is Jesus trying to teach us here?

He is trying to teach us the way of the Father; He is trying to teach us that the way of the Father is the way to salvation. And what is the way of the Father? Simple. The Father *is* mercy itself, and the way to salvation is by being merciful just as the Father is merciful.³ Jesus

gives examples of ways that we can do that; seemingly extreme examples that are difficult to hear and even more difficult to fulfill, but we are taught that the pathway to heaven is a narrow and winding one and one that won't be easy.⁴

But we actually have some control over our ultimate destiny and today's Gospel tells how to harness that control: it's how we judge others; how we are merciful to others; how we forgive others; how well we emulate the mercy of God, not just in words and actions, but in our hearts, minds, and souls as well. And God will show us the same judgement, the same mercy, the same forgiveness that we show to others. In the LORD'S Prayer, we even ask God to forgive us in the same way that we forgive others.

So, that gives us a huge challenge. But it is not an impossible challenge. God wants each and every one of us to share eternity with Him. So, He is not going to make the way to Salvation an impossible journey for us. He wants to be with us each step of the way and He wants to guide us and give us strength that we may truly emulate His mercy and successfully maneuver that narrow and winding pathway.

So, we need to open ourselves and our very lives to Him and invite Him to walk that pathway with us. We need to open our hearts, minds and souls to His guidance and to follow in His ways as we traverse that pathway. This will ensure us of the possibility of our Salvation, for as Scripture tells us, with God all things are possible.⁵ ✕

¹ McGlone Mary M., "Seeing Things Differently," National Catholic Reporter, February 18-21, 2019, p. 15.

² Luke 6:27-28

³ Luke 6:36

⁴ Matthew 7:13-14

⁵ Matthew 19:26