

Homily for 7th Sunday

The readings today instruct us about our right and wrong choices. The right choices lead us to God, and the wrong ones break our relationship with Him and with one another. The first reading shows us how David made the right choice, respecting God's anointed king by forgiving his offenses, while Saul continued to make the wrong choices, perpetuating his misery with his revenge. In the Responsorial Psalm, the Psalmist reminds us of the mercy of God and His compassion which we should practice. In the second reading, St. Paul tells us how the "First Adam" made a wrong choice of disobedience, bringing death into the world, whereas Jesus, the "Second Adam," made the correct choice of fulfilling his Father's saving plan. Today's Gospel gives us Jesus' revolutionary moral teaching about correct choices in our human relationships, placing special emphasis on the golden rule, "Do to others as you would have them do to you." Jesus invites us to celebrate with him what is best in ourselves.

Revenge, or "an eye for an eye" approach is becoming the predominating mood in society. We want things quickly, including our justice. We're running out of patience for just about everything. When the signal turns green, we need the person in front of us to move immediately. We need our computers to boot up faster. During rush hour, I try to be the first one out of the subway car so I don't have to wait behind all the people going up the stairs. In reality, I probably save myself only about 60 seconds. It's a little scary to imagine the lack of patience our future generations will have. It's important for us to analyze the kind of impact a culture of revenge can have on our society. There is the risk of us becoming completely intolerant of each other. We are already becoming so intolerant that it's scary to think about what it will lead to. *While checking his bags at the airport, a man became indignant with the employee who handled luggage. For several minutes he belittled the young man and criticized his every move. Surprisingly, the curbside porter didn't seem troubled by this man's verbal abuse. After the angry man entered the airport, a woman approached the luggage handler and asked, "How do you put up with such injustice?" The young man said, "It's easy. That guy's going to New York, but I'm sending his bags to Brazil."*

The act of forgiveness is a fruit of our relationship with Jesus Christ. God asks us to forgive. Christ must become our internal guide for how we live and what we choose to do. The language is poetical and dramatic, stirring up wonder in us at the wonderful thing that is generosity of spirit. People who are generous of spirit are able to go beyond the injustices they suffer – insults (the meaning of the slap on the cheek), dishonesty, cruelty – and hear a cry for help, the desperate search for love and respect, to be recognised as a person of worth. Every once in a way God blesses our world with such people – St Francis of Assisi in earlier times, Gandhi and Mother Teresa in our century. The passage reminds us that they are the "sons and daughters of the Most High", who reveal new possibilities for humanity. "Having heard Buddha speak against returning evil for evil, a man decides to see if Buddha practises what he preaches. The man shouts all kinds of abuse at the great teacher and then calls him a stupid fool. Buddha listens patiently. When the man runs out of bad things to say, Buddha says, 'my son if one refuses to accept a gift from another, to whom does the gift go?' 'Any fool knows that, the man replies scornfully. The gift goes back to the giver!' 'My son, says Buddha, you have given me much verbal abuse. I refuse to accept your gift'. The man is dumbfounded. Buddha continues, 'The one who slanders another is like someone who spits at the sky. His spittle does not dirty or soil the sky, it only comes back to soil the face of the one who spits. When we forgive, we celebrate our own greatness, the fleeting moments when, as parents, teachers, friends, or church ministers, we found we had the capacity to rise above pettiness, desire for revenge and sectarianism, and reach out to others in love. We got a glimpse of the divine spark within us. Hinduism suggests that the highest platform to exist on is the platform of compassion. Compassion means trying to adjust our vision in the following manner: Trying to understand the pain and suffering of the offender that is causing them to behave in hurtful ways. Seeing what lessons we can learn from the situation and how we might have contributed to it. Understanding that the soul inhabiting all bodies is pure and good but is being forced to act in irrational ways while stuck in the material world. Forgiveness takes incredible amounts of strength and character. In fact, it builds character. We have to decide, if we want to live a life filled with vengeful and angry thoughts or a life in which we are trying to forgive, even if not always successfully and become sons and daughters of God.