

## Homily for the 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

OK, so about that last line from our Gospel today – “be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Probably for some of you, that line just slipped on by, and you didn’t pay it too much attention. But for those of us who can struggle with perfectionistic tendencies, I can hear the battle taking place in your minds: “See, I *AM* supposed to strive to be perfect after all – the Bible even tells me so! But, no matter how hard I try, I just can’t be perfect! Well, I’ll just have to try harder. Poor me!”

Just for the record, none of us can be perfect. If we could, we would never sin; we wouldn’t need a Savior, and we would be God. Therefore, since none of those statements are true – we cannot be perfect. But isn’t that a contradiction of what Scripture is saying, then: “be perfect”, it says, “as God is”? Well, since I’m not in the business of preaching heresy and contradicting the Bible or the Church, we’d better get to the bottom of this!

For starters, we have to remember that the Bible was not written in English. In fact, the Bible was written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. The New Testament was written entirely in Greek. The word “perfect” is one meaning of the Greek word ‘telios’. Telios refers to “reaching the end or purpose for which something was created”. So, a telescope, which has ‘telios’ as its root, means “far seeing” – seeing out beyond earth to “the end of the universe”, so to speak. In a nutshell, telios means that “something is brought to its full purpose, potential and intended end.” So, for example, the telios of a hammer is hammering a nail – it is “perfect” therefore, when it’s doing what it was created for.

Now, obviously our end as human beings is different than that of a hammer – unless we’re going to “hammer away at someone” or “hammer something out”! So, what then is our purpose? Why did God create us? What are we even here for? Good questions! Well, as 1 John tells us in the Bible, “God is love”. And in creating us, God fashioned us in His image and likeness. Therefore, we are made to love as He loves. This is our full purpose, potential and intended end. However, without God we cannot fulfill our end, because He is love. No God, no love. No love, no God. The Good News, though, for us, as Christians, is that God does not leave us hanging. Rather, in Jesus, we are made capable of actually loving with God’s love, because the Father’s Spirit dwells within us.

Now, Jesus makes us capable of loving like God. And, the Spirit of God is the love of God within us. But, neither of those truths guarantee that we will love as God loves, however. In order to love like God, we have to really choose – every single day – to love as God loves. In other words, it’s a partnership. God enables us to love and gives us His love, but we must still choose to love. And why should we want to love like God loves? Because not to love in a godly way is ultimately to be sin, because at the end of the day, there are fundamentally only two options: God or *not* God; unconditional love or selfishness; God’s way or my way!

But, in order to choose to love as God loves, that means we have to choose to live as the Father has shown us and taught us in His Son. How did Jesus show and teach us how to love? Well, for starters, in the first reading today, God's word proclaims: "You shall not bear hatred for your brother or sister in your heart... Take no revenge and cherish no grudge against any of your people. You shall love your neighbor as yourself." And then in the Gospel, Jesus teaches, and shows us by His life: "You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you... For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? ... Do not the pagans do the same?" And then the famous line: "So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect."

In other words, the purpose of our lives is to learn how to love as God loves; and God loves in some pretty radical ways – just look at those statements, proven by how Jesus loved us from the cross! The thing is in order to love like God, we have to let Jesus stretch us, and make us more capable of loving like Him.

I came across the following passage from St. Augustine, who explains this very well. He wrote, “Suppose you are going to fill some container, and you know you will be given a large amount. Then you set about stretching your sack or wineskin or whatever it is. Why? Because you know the quantity you will have to put in it, and your eyes tell you there is not enough room. By stretching it, therefore, you increase the capacity of the sack. This is how God deals with us. Simply by making us wait [through time and experience] he increases our desire, which in turn enlarges the capacity of our soul, making it able to receive what is to be given to us.”

My friends, God has a great gift to give us in His love. And the more we really cooperate with His plan to stretch us, is the degree we will be more and more immersed in that perfect love. God bless you.