

Monday Week 11 of Ordinary Time

I Kings 21:1-16, Mt. 5:38-42

As the collect begins – God is our strength! He is our hope and by His grace we can follow in the way of peace and reconciliation. Revenge is the complete opposite and in the Gospel Jesus teaches us that His way is not revengeful. Each time we pray the Lord's Prayer we are asking our heavenly Father to forgive us AS we forgive others. Jesus underlines these words by adding, “If you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive you your trespasses” (Mt. 6:15). By His grace we can forgive those who hurt us.

Certain cultural situations escape us in today's Gospel. First of all, to be hit on the right cheek, the assailant would have to either backhand you, since only the right hand could be used (the left hand was used for unclean activities), or hit you with his fist. Fists were used between equals; backhanding was done to inferiors. Therefore, once backhanded, if you stood your ground and turned the other cheek, you are showing your dignity and saying “hit me as an equal” (which no master would do to his servant or child).

On giving your cloak as well as tunic... that was all poor people had to wear. It was not scandalous to be naked but it was scandalous to look upon a naked person. Offering all your clothing shows that you are keeping your dignity and putting your assailant in a compromising situation.

On going an extra mile, the occupying Romans could command locals to carry their packs for one mile only; any more and the soldier risked punishment. Going beyond the legal limit, you put yourself back in control and refuse to behave as a victim. The soldier risks punishment if you carry on!

So how to translate this to our modern world. We have received God's grace in Baptism and in the other sacraments. Grace is the “medium” by which our human dignity is retained and it helps us to rise above those who have hurt us. This is not by lording over them but by praying for them. When we ask Jesus to bless *them* as human beings, little by little, the Holy Spirit works in us and slowly, very slowly, we find that we are letting go of the hurt. Our Lord Jesus Christ asked His Father to forgive His crucifiers (Lk. 23:34). We can ask Jesus to help us to do the same, and thereby we retain our human dignity.

Carol Ann Harnett 15th June 2020