

Tuesday Reflection 15th June 2021

In yesterday's Gospel, we saw Jesus upsetting the doctrine that revenge should be proportional ('a tooth for a tooth') to reject the notion of revenge completely ('turn the other cheek').

Today's Gospel takes us one step further - not only should we not take revenge; we should in fact 'love our enemy', a complete reversal of the conventional teaching that we should *hate* our enemy. 'Hating one's enemy' reminds me of Dorothy Day's dictum that "I really only love God as much as I love the person I love the least."

All this raises for me the question of "Who is my enemy?". How does someone become 'my enemy' or, conversely, how do I become an enemy to someone else? Was it something I did or something 'they' did? If it was something I did, then it behoves me to apologise and offer to make restitution. If it was something they did - or I think they did - then perhaps it behoves me not just to 'turn the other cheek', but to be merciful and forgive them, which is the loving thing to do.

Or perhaps nobody 'did' anything at all. And this is where things start getting complicated and we need to start some serious soul-searching.

Could it be that we identify people as enemies either because somebody has told us to, or because we see them as different and therefore somehow threatening?

These and similar questions are brought into sharper focus this week, which is International Refugee Week, when we are encouraged to think especially of those whom hostility or deprivation or hunger have forced to leave their homes and seek a new life elsewhere. Make no mistake about it: these people *are* a threat - they are a threat to our comfort and complacency.

We have a choice: we can either go along with the policy pursued by successive British Governments of 'defending our borders' and creating a 'hostile environment' for incomers, or we can follow the exhortation in Exodus (22:21) "Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt" and embrace the stranger in our midst as a suffering brother or sister in Christ "I was a stranger and you invited me in" (Matthew 25:35). The choice is ours.

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