

7th Sunday in Ordinary Time

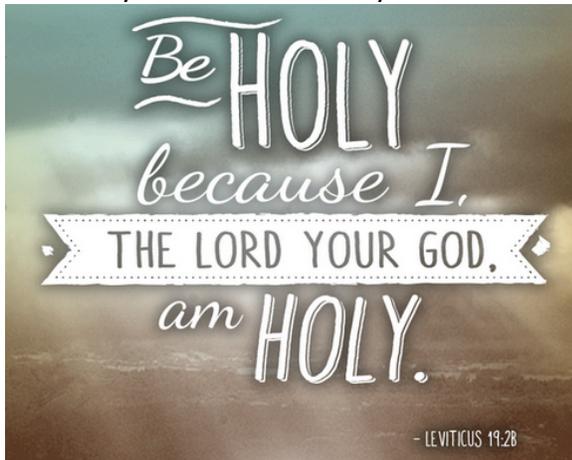
Cycle A, 2.23.20

Leviticus 19:1-2,17-18/

1 Corinthians 3:16-23/Matthew 5:38-48

BECOMING HOLY...ONE DAY AT A TIME

Some people misread the scriptures given to us today as a call to some kind of flowery passivity or stoic indifference. Instead the scriptures actually call us to be imaginative and to be agents of change by acting and responding in unexpected or surprising ways. The scriptures today call us to be holy like our God is holy.



We can easily relegate being holy for special people or special occasions as though being holy was like using the fine china and heirloom silverware for an important gathering or taking the sports car which spends most of its time under a cover inside the garage out for a drive on a dry, sunny day when no precipitation is forecast or just for people able to have such luxuries. But being holy is not about being special, secure or comfortable: it is being both different and ordinary at the same time. Being holy is about being different because it is about being like God. It is ordinary because it is possible for all of us every day, one holy moment at a time!

Holiness does not require a mutant gene or that we be a superhero. Holiness is attainable for all of us by the grace of God.

Holiness requires that we exercise discipline and make sacrifices on a daily basis. Isn't this exactly what Jesus is saying in the gospel passage we have today? In our ordinary, everyday situations we are given lots of opportunities to be holy. When we are wronged we need to be different and not return wrong for wrong, realizing that two wrongs do not make a right but just double the wrong. Instead of perceiving a situation as win-lose we can imagine it into a win-win situation. We can return a right and perhaps at least negate the wrong! The adage "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" is a good, helpful agreement; it helps keep violence from escalating as vengeance or fear overpowers reason. It hopefully keeps people from being killed because of a disagreement about loud music or road rage! Jesus' message is that a mature, loving, humane response avoids vengeance, violence, and harboring grudges.

Something I find annoying is to be washing my car and have someone drive up and suggest that I wash their car next. Yet I find that very same remark often on the tip of my tongue as a conversation starter when I see someone else washing their car. Why say to someone else that which I find so annoying? Now when I am asked, I respond that I am happy to help them to wash their car. So far no one has taken me up on it!



Being holy is kind of like learning to share. It really isn't too logical to share. Why give or loan some part of something when we could keep it all for ourselves? Yet most parents eventually cajole, threaten, or bribe their children into sharing, no matter how reluctantly or half-heartedly. Giving up vengeance and judgment are similarly difficult for us to learn. But that is what makes the difference and makes Christians different! To offer the other cheek, the coat off our back, to go the extra mile are beyond what is reasonable, beyond what is necessary, yet Jesus is telling his people this is what is expected because they are called to be holy as the God who loves them is holy. We go beyond what is required in order to demonstrate the God's love.

Saint Paul reminds the Corinthians that they are collectively, not individually, the temple of the Holy Spirit and so should keep themselves pure, should remember it is God who is holy and that they are called to become Godlike. God is love and hatred has no place in the Christian heart. God loves all creation, all people: be they disciples of Apollos, Paul, or Peter; be they Greeks, Medes, Egyptians, Jews, Asians, Africans, Europeans, Australians, or North or South Americans; God loves us all. We are called to be loving towards all creation as our God is.

Does this suggest that we should allow or ignore genocide, rape, murder, or sexual or physical abuse? No! No! No! Like Jesus we need to take stands and oppose evil but always in a manner which does not return evil for evil and instead shines the light of the Gospel on the situation. There is a story about a soldier in the military who got down on his knees next to his bed and silently prayed every night before going to sleep. This daily routine began to irritate one of the other soldiers and one night he

was fed up. After a hard day of being out in the field he took one of his dirty, muddy boots and hurled it at the man who was on his knees praying. The boot hit the man squarely in the head.



He groaned, rubbed his head but kept on praying. The other man turned over in disgust and went to sleep. The next morning when the angry soldier woke up he found both of his boots, sparkling with shine, next to his bed. Well that broke open his heart and he wanted to know about the God that could produce such type of service in a soldier's heart.

There is a saying that the person who defeats one's own anger has overcome a formidable foe and that two cannot quarrel when one will not. Can we exercise a love which challenges people to be their best by trying to be our best, by generously replying with compassion and mercy? With God's grace may we strive through sacrifice and discipline each day, in every trial and struggle, to be different, to be God-like, to be holy and so help to make God present, known, loved and served in ordinary daily life. May God be blessed.

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