

Matthew 5:43-45: *“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.*

The readings, sermons and the e-mail devotions this Lent are asking us to do really difficult things. Throw a party for your deadbeat son who squandered his inheritance on wine, women and song. Forgive the Nazi who killed your family and held you prisoner. Pray for the people who killed your children in school. Forgive your brothers who sold you into slavery, as Joseph did. Break bread with Judas, knowing he was a thief and a backstabber. Pray, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they are doing” as Jesus did, as he hung on the cross between two criminals.

This love of our enemy and forgiveness for those who harm us is not human nature. Revenge is so tempting. Anger is so natural. Yet Matthew 5:44 says to “pray for those who persecute you” and Matthew 5:48 says “Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Talk about a high hurdle to clear ! Its so hard to work toward a goal we can never achieve. But Jesus asks us to keep on trying. Tough stuff. Yet we try so “we may be children of our Father in heaven.”

The second half of this Scripture passage is another tough pill for us to swallow. God sends the sun to shine on evil as well as good, and rain on both the righteous and unrighteous. Don't we really want God to punish evildoers with a holy kick to the shins? Maybe like drowning the Egyptians in the Red Sea? C'mon, you wish for that, don't you? I do at times. But again, Jesus asks us to live like God's children and not be judgmental or ask for retribution. God will handle that in His way and on His schedule. We are asked to channel only His love. To everyone. Even mean people.

The Jesuit priest, Tony DeMello wrote about this type of love in his book “The Way to Love.” He writes:

“What is love? Take a look at a rose. Is it possible for the rose to say, ‘I shall offer my fragrance to good people and withhold it from bad people?’ Or can you imagine a lamp that withholds its rays from a wicked person who seeks to walk in its light? And observe how helplessly and indiscriminately a tree gives its shade to everyone; good and bad, young and old, high and low, animals and humans.....even to the one who seeks to cut it down..... Contemplate in astonishment the sheer goodness of the rose, the lamp, the tree for there you have an image of what love is all about.”

The tough assignment we are given by Jesus is to channel His love under every circumstance, regardless if the recipient is worthy of God’s love or not. We are not worthy of God's love either. This requires us to subdue our human “nature” and stretch ourselves toward our heavenly calling to love.

Lord, forgive my tendency toward revenge and anger. Mute my harmful words. Help me to dig deep for forgive those who harm me. Help me to channel your love as the rose, the lamp and the tree. Amen.

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