**Homily for the 7th Sunday in Ordinary Time (2/23/2019)**

Rev. Francis Kim

 Late one night, a truck driver pulled into a roadside cafe for a little something to eat. As he was eating, three nasty-looking motorcyclists noisily strutted in and made their way to the bar. For some unknown reason, they gravitated toward the truck driver. One poured a little salt on his head, another knocked his pie on the floor, and the third managed to knock his coffee off the counter and into his lap.

 The truck driver got up, said nothing, paid his bill and made his exit. “That dude sure wasn’t much of a fighter,” sneered one of the cyclists. The waiter peered out the window onto the dark parking lot and answered, “He is not much of a driver either. He just ran over three motorcycles!”

 It gives joy to our heats to see nasty people get paid back for their nastiness. Jesus gives us a different way to look at things in today’s Gospel. Jesus approaches the question of just retribution for how we should treat others, especially those who mistreat us. He calls us to reject the belief that aggression, violence, and retaliation are the ways of solve problems!

 You have heard expression, ‘Forgive and forget.’ When we forgive someone, we have to forget first. But, is it really possible? If someone insults you or tries to take advantage of you, how do you respond? Do you repay in kind? Maybe, someone once hurt you very deeply, and the emotional wounds still ache. The last thing you think could ever do is forgive and forget.

 But, Jesus goes even further. He not only tells us to forgive and forget, but to love the one who hurt us, and pray for that person’s welfare. Is it possible? What should we do?

 First of all, remember how generously God forgave us. We hurt God far more than anyone ever hurt us, and yet He willingly sent His Son to die in our place, so we could be forgiven.

 And, try to see the other person through God’s eyes. God loves them just as He loves you. Don’t hold on to your hurts any longer, but turn them over to Christ and ask Him to help you forgive others, and then love them just as He does!

 Never forget how much it cost Jesus to forgive us, and how much He loves us!

 Here is a story: A loving mother who saved her little girl from a burning house suffered severe burns in her hands and arms. When the girl grew older, not knowing how her mother’s arms had become so seared, the girl was ashamed of those scarred, twisted hands and always insisted that her mother wear long sleeve to cover up the ugliness.

 But, one day the daughter asked her mother how her hands had become so scarred. The mother, for the first time, told her the story of how she had saved the daughter’s life with those hands. The daughter wept tears of gratitude and said, “Oh, mom, those are beautiful hands, the most beautiful in the world. Don’t ever hide them again.”

 Just so, the blood of Jesus and the crucifix may seem to be repulsive, but, His nail-pierced hands are the most beautiful wounds, for they tell us of His love and His willingness to save us and forgive us our sins regardless of the cost.

 On the Cross, Jesus showed example how to forgive enemies. He forgave those who were killing Him and had mercy on the repentant thief. He said on the Cross before dying, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

 Jesus says to us today, “Love your enemies,” and, “Pray for your persecutors.” Perhaps, this teaching of Jesus is the most difficult for us to follow. We can love our neighbor. We can love the disadvantaged. We can love those who perceive to be inferior to us. But, to love enemy, the one who intentionally harmed us, is very difficult to do.

 Jesus says, “You must be perfect as your heaven Father is perfect.” The word translated as ‘perfect’ comes from a Greek word meaning to be ‘full grown.’ We are to become ‘full grown,’ mature followers of Christ.

 For example, when children do wrong, parents or adults don’t take revenge on them or retaliate against them. Instead, they react in a way that will teach them with thoughtful advice and help them with loving-kindness. Likewise, the decision we make not to strike back at those who do us wrong requires that we are to be the adult in that situation. The mature Christian does not take revenge or hold grudges, but forgive them and pray for them.

 Sometimes, the word ‘forgiveness’ sounds weak at first. But, which requires more courage, inner strength, and spiritual maturity, to strike back or to forgive?

 Today, we are told to turn the other cheek, to love in the face of hatred, and to love everyone even our enemies! Forgiveness may or may not bring healing to others. It always heals us and sets us free. Forgive one another as our heavenly Father always forgives us. It is the way to eternal peace. It is the way to live in the Kingdom of Heaven.