

24<sup>th</sup> February 2019 (Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C)

1 Samuel 26:2,7-9,11-13,22-23; Psalm 102(103):1-4,8,10,12-13; 1 Corinthians 15:45-49; Luke 6:27-38.

**Be compassionate, because your Father in heaven is compassionate!**

Very often in the gospels we see Jesus talking about the Father in heaven; Jesus has a very special relationship with the Father. In last week's gospel we read that blessed (*makarios*) are they who are poor, hungry, grieving or persecuted, because they are specially cared for by the Father. Today, as a continuation of last week's beatitudes, Jesus invites us to imitate the Father: be compassionate as your Father is compassionate. This is the basis of who we are as humans and as Christians, in the book of Genesis we are told that God created us in God's own image and likeness.

In Jesus we see how God makes himself vulnerable for our sake; he who is God has put aside his divinity and become one like us, in all things except sin, even unto death on the cross! (Philippians 2:5-8) In last week's gospel Jesus declares blessed those who are vulnerable. The poor, hungry, grieving and persecuted are not full (satisfied), and in their lack and vulnerability they keep searching. The vulnerable are open to accept God's blessings and hence even here on earth, they live the kingdom of God.

People who are vulnerable also know that they need help from their sisters and brothers and are open to accept and appreciate any gifts that come their way. People who acknowledge their vulnerability are not too proud to reach out towards those around them; they also understand what it means to be in need, and are therefore the first to be ready to help those who are not satisfied.

Today's gospel passage, following on from the beatitudes we read last week, develops the theme of vulnerability and teaches us how to reach out to others. Some of the axioms in today's gospel are not to be taken literally. If you are struck on one cheek you are not expected to simply sit there and wait to be struck again on the other cheek. If someone steals your cloak, you do not need to strip off your tunic also – that would render you naked! Rather Jesus invites us to be vulnerable and not to retaliate when someone hurts us. If I am slapped on the cheek my first reaction would be to slap him back, twice as hard; Jesus encourages us not to react but to forgive, because that is what the Father does with each one of us.

How could we have the right to call ourselves Christian and children of God if we are not able to resist our basic human responses. Rather than responding to violence with violence, trying to establish that we are not weaker than our assailant, Jesus invites us to love. Love renders one weak and vulnerable; love makes one the image of God!

It is very easy for us to condemn our sisters and brothers when we see them act in a way that we judge inappropriate, forgetting that often we too act in a way that does not reflect our human and Christian status. To judge and to condemn our sisters and brothers is the opposite of what Jesus is teaching us today. When I judge and condemn I place myself in a place of strength and authority, declaring myself to be above my sister and brother. Jesus tells us that that is not our place, rather we need to acknowledge our own vulnerability and thus be able to recognise and accept that our sisters and brothers too are vulnerable. When we are vulnerable towards each other we can recognise God in each other and help each other grow in God's image and likeness.

Therefore, be compassionate (= *cum patire* – to suffer with) as the Father is compassionate. Be weak towards one another so that together we can build something bigger than ourselves!

Fr Mario