

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Jesus' preaching on the plain continues in today's Gospel. You recall that Jesus began that sermon calling them blessed who are poor and hungry and who mourn, while pronouncing woes on those who are rich and satisfied and who laugh. And who was that poor, hungry, and weeping One? It was Jesus, in the first instance. He was the one without majesty; He was the one who was oppressed; He was the *"man of sorrows"* who was *"acquainted with grief"* (Isa. 53:2, 3, 7).

Jesus continued, calling those disciples blessed who are hated and excluded and reviled and are called evil *"on account of the Son of Man"* (Luke 6:22), while pronouncing woes on guileful disciples who speak pleasant falsehoods for the sake of being liked and well thought of. Yet again, He was ultimately the one hated and excluded — *"despised and rejected,"* Isaiah says; He was ultimately the one reviled and spurned — *"stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted," "pierced,"* and *"crushed,"* Isaiah says (Isa. 53:4-5).

Let us trust in Jesus when we are downtrodden, knowing that in Him we are accounted blessed. Let us stand firm in faith in the face of such vile treatment *"on account of the Son of Man,"* comforted that we are accounted blessed as we follow after Him as the Son of God, our Savior. Rejoice and leap for joy for this blessedness, Jesus says.

But more than that, Jesus tells us that such blessed discipleship calls for a response which He outlines in our Gospel. And it is totally radical, for it is not what our flesh wants to do, and it is not what the world teaches us to do. It's what our Savior calls us to do.

Hear again the call to Jesus' disciples: *"Love your enemies."* Love them, He says; don't try to destroy them, even though they are trying to destroy you. Love your enemies, meaning *"do good to those who hate you";* meaning, *"bless those who curse you,"*; meaning *"pray for those who abuse you."* Love your enemies, meaning if *"one ... strikes you on the cheek, offer the other [cheek] also, and [if one] takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either."* Love them, meaning *"Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them"* — the last admonition, you recognize as the Golden Rule.

Jesus did not misspeak. St. Luke, St. Paul's companion, did not misunderstand the Apostle or the Spirit's prompting. Consider St. Paul's exhortation to Christians. It's what the editors of the ESV call the "Marks of the True Christian." It echoes Jesus. *"Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in*

*tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.*

*“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’ To the contrary, ‘if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:9-21).*

These Scriptures speak of the sanctified life of Christians ... these things and more, even though our flesh fights against them, for Christians are not of the world any more (John 17:16). Christians are new creations (2 Cor. 5:17), born from above into the kingdom of heaven (John 3:3). Christians have a new mind — the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5); Christians have been given new hearts and spirits in the waters of Holy Baptism (Ezek. 36:25-27), leading to sanctified living.

This is the radical life to which we are called, a life of mercy, even as our Father in heaven is merciful, not judging one another, not condemning one another, but forgiving each other and giving to each other ... doing these things not because of what we might receive back, but because it’s what Jesus wants us to do; it’s who He has remade us to be. Which doesn’t mean we won’t receive something back. Jesus says we will ... *“Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over.”* That’s just not the reason we do good.

The problem is, of course, that sin still adheres to us, even after conversion, the sin that wars against our new self, the sin that looks inward rather than outward. It’s the Old Adam in us, the sinful flesh that moves us to do *“the evil [we] do not want”* to do, rather than *“the good [we] want”* to do (Rom. 7:19). St. Paul says, *“the desires of the flesh ... and the desires of the Spirit ... are opposed to each other, to keep [us] from doing the things [we] want to do”* (Gal. 5:17). And these desires of the flesh give birth to all sorts of evil: *“sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these”* (Gal. 5:19-20). We’re guilty, if not of the sins in the list, at least, of the *“things like these”*!

That’s why we call our selves “poor sinners.” It’s why we confess “that we are by nature sinful and unclean and that we have sinned against [God] by thought, word, and deed.” It’s why we admit that we have sinned against God “by what we have

done and by what we have left undone.” We haven’t “loved our neighbors as ourselves,” let alone loved our enemies (*Lutheran Service Book*, Divine Service, Settings 2 & 3). We do not do without fail everything that Jesus calls us to do, which means also that we cannot depend on our meager doing for hope of our salvation.

We must continue to look to Christ and to our blessedness in Him, for we belong to Him. Our flesh has been crucified with Him along with our passions and desires (Gal. 5:24). We have died with Him ... yes, that we might be raised with Him, but also that we might “*walk in newness of life*” (Rom. 6:4). We want to live by the Spirit, not gratifying “*the desires of the flesh*,” but walking “*by the Spirit*” (Gal. 5:16), but in our failures, we are always looking to Christ, who took our sins upon Himself and forgives us when we fail to live up to the standard that He sets forth.

We look to Christ, not only because He left us “*an example, so that [we] might follow in his steps*,” but because He was able to do what we could not: “*He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.*” He did it! He did it for us. “*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree ... By his wounds [we] have been healed*” (1 Pet. 2:21-24).

Therefore, God grant that we might live out our baptismal calling in Christ, dying “*to sin*” that we might “*live to righteousness*” (1 Pet. 2:24) ... no longer living to ourselves, but living “*to the Lord*” (Rom. 14:7-8). God grant that the radical love of Christ, His mercy and forgiveness, may flow into our ears and our hearts and flow out from us into the world.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.