

If we get a ticket for speeding we know there's a scale for the fine. The more we were over the speed limit, the greater the fine and the points against our license. This is but a small example of how we humans mete out justice for infractions. It goes up the scale, too, for other crimes: burglary, theft, murder. All have assigned guides for the punishment to be imposed, to do justice according to our sense of justice. Ten miles over the speed limit? \$120 sets the balance of justice back to even. Someone commits murder? They are liable to lose their own life.

It is what we consider just that Jesus speaks to us today. He tells us our sense of justice is poor. We love those who love us. Who doesn't do that? We do good to those who do good to us. How is that special or deserving of praise? We are only returning the favor, like a scale of justice. Someone is nice to me, I'm nice to them. Someone lends to me, I lend to them. Jesus points us to God's way of being, "But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil." (Luke 6:35-36)

The great Saint Isaac of Nineveh develops these words of Christ for us telling us to "Be a herald of God's goodness, for God rules over you, unworthy though you are; for although your debt to Him is so great, yet He is not seen exacting payment from you, and from the small works you do, He bestows great rewards upon you. Do not call God just, for His justice is not manifest in the things concerning you. ...His Son revealed to us that He is good and kind. 'He is good,' He says, 'to the evil and to the impious' (cf. Luke 6:35). How can you call God just when you come across the Scriptural passage on the wage given to the workers?...How can a man call God just when he comes across the passage on the prodigal son who wasted his wealth with riotous living, how for the compunction alone which he showed, the father ran and fell upon his neck and gave him authority over all his wealth? (Luke 15:11 ff.). None other but His very Son said these things concerning Him...Where, then, is God's justice, for whilst we are sinners Christ died for us! (cf. Rom. 5:8). But if here He is merciful, we may believe that He will not change."

Jesus commands us to "Love your enemies, do good and lend expecting nothing in return" because this is how He loves us. He loves us who sin against Him. We who make ourselves enemies of God by our sins. Because this is how God loves us, Jesus commands us to show deference and respect even when others are not nice or fair to us. He invites us beyond the safe boundaries of what is fair or nice. He establishes a way of life based not on how we are but who and how God is. "Be merciful just as your Father is also merciful...then your reward will be great and you will be children of the Most High, for He Himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked."

If we measure Jesus' commandment to love our enemies against our own weakness we find it impossible to do. To love our enemies at the risk of being rejected? To do good and lend at the risk of not being repayed? Yes, this He commands of us. It is not virtue enough not to hate our enemies but we must love them. It is not virtue enough to do good or lend and expect a return but we must expect nothing back. This is a command which seems beyond human nature. But Christ does not ask the impossible, "For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:26)

How does love for enemies make itself known? We love our enemy in truth when we are not sorrowful at his or her success nor do we rejoice at his or her fall. This is quite different from what the world expects. The sinful world rejoices at the downfall of an enemy and even

has a word for it *schadenfreude* in German: the enjoyment obtained from others' troubles. The command of Jesus, to love enemies, to do good, to lend without expecting repayment, is the power of God made manifest in the world. It is God made manifest in the world. It is the utmost perfection of love. When we fulfill this commandment to love our enemies, doing good and lending expecting nothing in return (even if we're laughed at or chided for it), God's mercy enters the world through us. His presence is made known among men. "For my power is made perfect in weakness" God tells us. What the world sees as weakness is the power of God.

By being merciful and loving to those who are not our friends we are liberated from the cycle of hatred and vengeance of the fallen world. By being loving and merciful we clothe ourselves in an attribute of God. We become godlike which is the vocation each of us has received. We become sons and daughters of the Most High and further show to the world that in the love for one's enemies there is the power of the Kingdom of God made manifest here on earth.

May we keep the commandments of God to love one another, even our enemy, because He has called us to be His sons and daughters by grace. As we resemble our parents in the flesh, let us by showing mercy resemble our Father, God who reigns with the Son and the Spirit.