

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time 2020

My beloved brothers and sisters, the Way of Jesus is a very difficult road, that is why so few really take it! It demands real change and conversion on our part, which begins with a change of attitude and thinking. Sometimes, it seems as if we are scaling a sheer cliff face, especially when we are faced with the reality of an insult or a deep hurt.

Forgiveness is not natural to us since the fall. What is natural is resentment. Going beyond what is required is not natural to us; what is natural to us is preserving our rights and guarding and protecting ourselves and our resources.

If we are going to understand the radical nature of Jesus' teaching to us, His disciples, we need to understand the background behind this gospel: According to Jewish custom, slapping someone on the face was an insult. Slapping them with the back of one's hand, was an even greater insult, slapping them with the left hand was the greatest of insults.

According to the Law of Moses, a Jew who borrowed from a fellow Jew, could be required to hand over his cloak for the day; however, the lender had to return it at night, because the cloak was also used as a blanket.

At the time of Jesus, the Romans were permitted by law to enlist natives as guides or back-bearers for a stadia, approximately one mile, and that is how the Roman armies often traveled, by forcing the natives to bear their packs. However, it was also a form of humiliation reminding the natives who were in charge and that they had been conquered by the Roman Armies!

What is Jesus really saying to us when He tells us to turn the other cheek, to hand over our cloak and tunic, and to go the extra mile? He is teaching us to respond to personal hurts, injuries, insults, and humiliations with not only forbearance, but with generosity and forgiveness as well. He teaches us to respond to personal insults with grace, patience and forgiveness. He is teaching us to break the cycle of violence, choosing not to get our way, but by going out of our way, even when others do not deserve it!

You may be tempted to say to yourself, I can't do that! But that is what Jesus did; and if we are united to Him by Baptism, Eucharist and by grace, we can do this too! Ask Jesus for the Grace of this radical change of heart and temperament. Ask Him to give you the courage to forgive, again, and again, and again, until the forgiving is done. Ask Him for generosity of heart in serving even those who do not deserve it! Ask Him to mold you and shape you into His own image and likeness!