



SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

CYCLE C

I Samuel 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23

I Corinthians 15: 45-49

Luke 6:27-38

GATHERING

(A lighted candle and an open bible rest on a table in the gathering place. A selection of various instruments of measurement is also on the table, e.g., a ruler, a measuring cup, a scale, a tape measure, a yardstick, measuring spoons, etc.)

Last week we focused on rooting our lives in God rather than in mere human self-sufficiency. *(As this gathering of the community gets underway, some conversation explores this question: During this past week when did you have an experience of being rooted in security that comes from God? What was the experience like for you?)*

OPENING PRAYER

(The facilitator invites the community to a few minutes of silence to become conscious of the presence of God. Some quiet music plays in the background.)

Leader: In the name of the Creator who gathers us,

All: Let God's name be praised.

Leader: In the name of Jesus who frees us,

All: Let God's name be praised.

Leader: In the name of the Spirit who sustains us,

All: Let God's name be praised.

Member I: You are the one who gathers us, loving, compassionate God. Blessed are you, loving God. You are the source of our life. Your Spirit binds us together in respect, dignity and service. Gather our community together now, and for all time to come.

All: You are the one who gathers us, loving, compassionate God.

Member II: With an overflowing love, you draw us to yourself and send us forth again in your name to take your message of love to all.

All: You are the one who gathers us, loving, compassionate God.

Member III: Gather us now into one holy union of hearts in your heart. Give us the grace to look beyond all divisions to the vision of life and hope.

All: You are the one who gathers us, loving, compassionate God.

Focus Question

Recall an occasion when you were in a position where you could have *gotten back* at someone who had hurt you or a member of your family. What was that experience like for you?

SCRIPTURE SHARING AND REFLECTION

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause between readings.)

Commentary

Enemies happen! No doubt about it. We have personal enemies; persons who hurt us, reject us, attack us, cheat us, abandon us, use us and/or abuse us. We have family enemies, national enemies, global enemies and even religious enemies. In the book of Samuel we read of two different ways to deal with one's enemy. Abishai, seeing the enemy caught defenseless, quite naturally wants to take advantage of the situation. For him power lay in violence. David, on the other hand, responds quite differently. For David, power lay in non-violence. The latter is a difficult choice, especially in the face of attack, hate, abuse, etc.

In the New Testament readings we are again faced with two ways of dealing with the enemy. Jesus reveals the way of his Father. He reveals to us our invisible God, a God of great compassion, forgiveness and love. Ours is a God who loves us even when we hate; a God who gives when we ask and even when we take with ungrateful hearts. Jesus exhorts us to be compassionate as our Father is.

How are we to measure out our grievances, our truth, our love and/or our justice? We carry within ourselves the power to choose the way. Will it be an eye for an eye (like Abishai), or good measure pressed down shaken together, running over (like Jesus)?

Jesus speaks as though it is possible for us to live this way of love. He does not say, "If you are able do such and so—" He says, "Do such and so—" Yes, it is possible, not easy, but possible, because of the grace of God. Dietrich Bonhoeffer speaks of this grace as a *costly grace*.

Costly grace confronts us as a gracious call to follow Jesus; it comes as a word of forgiveness to the broken spirit and the contrite heart. Grace is costly because it compels a man to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow him; it is a grace because Jesus says: "My yoke is easy and my burden is light."¹

Following Jesus, we are a walking, breathing sign of contradiction in our world. We act justly with love, searching for truth and then allowing that truth to bring forth life rather than death. We know the cost of

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, NY; MacMillan Co., 1963), p. 48.

discipleship! Living this gospel we discover that the difficult choices get easier and the enemies get fewer!

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

1. Who do you know who is publicly speaking out as Jesus did? What is your reaction? What is the larger community's reaction?
2. When have you paid a price for loving an enemy, extending a loan, doing good for one condemned, or pardoning an offender?
3. Recall a time in your own life that you received the overflowing good measure of God's compassion and/or pardon. How has that experience influenced your compassion towards others?
4. How does this gospel speak to your attitudes about: the death penalty, abortion, assisted suicide, welfare-assisted housing, etc.?

RESPONSE IN ACTION

1. Spend some time reflecting on your *enemies* and choose one for this week, praying for the *costly grace* of reconciliation.
2. View the film, **Dead Man Walking** in light of this Sunday's readings. Discuss it in your small Christian community or at a gathering of small communities in your parish.
3. Be more alert this week to an *enemy* in the news. Respond to this *enemy* in some way that reflects the attitude of Christ.

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

(The facilitator draws the attention of the community to the instruments of measure on the table and invites the members to some moments of reflection and prayer about how they measure out their response to their enemies or those from whom they are alienated.)

Leader: Let us pray for the wisdom of Jesus to discern how to be bearers of love, compassion, justice and pardon in our world today. *(Pause.)*

Let us pray for the costly grace of discipleship. *(Pause.)*

Let us pray that we be an encouragement for one another's discipleship in this world, not a hindrance. *(Pause.)*

All: Lead us from death to life, from falsehood to truth;
 Lead us from despair to hope, from fear to trust;
 Lead us from hate to love, from war to peace;
 Let peace fill our heart, our world, our universe.²

