

THE EMMAUS SERIES

7th Sunday Year C

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

1 Corinthians 15:45-49

Luke 6:27-38

Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate

Last week we heard Luke's presentation of 'The Beatitudes'. Today we continue the same passage – as Jesus spells out practical implications of a teaching that has immense importance for those who want to be his followers. We have heard many times of the 'New Commandment' and the 'Law of Love'; but have we made them our rule of life? Today's gospel can help us to do this. 'Love your enemies', Jesus tells us. David's gesture towards king Saul demonstrates a certain nobility; but it is still far removed from the ideal of selflessness Jesus sets before us. 'Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you ... lend without any hope of return' may well seem an impossible ideal as a way of life. The first disciples of Jesus may well have made this judgment, had it not been for the memory of the life Jesus had lived in their midst. In the New Testament, these first followers share with us how they came to recognise the central importance of the New Commandment of love - as they reflected on the selfless life of Jesus and its culmination in his tragic death. St Paul, in today's second reading, tells us that he has come to see how Jesus has inaugurated a new beginning for the whole of humanity - far greater than that of the first creation. 'Bear one another's burdens', he wrote in another place, 'and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ' (Gal 6:2). It is the gift of the Saviour's own Spirit, he has come to see, that makes this possible: 'God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us' (Rom 5:5). John's interpretation of the teaching of Jesus is the same: 'I give you a new commandment ... that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends' (Jn 13:34; 15:12-13).

Clearly, this Law of Love – so insistently spelt out by Luke – is an ideal that none of us will ever fully realise. How can we love others as Christ himself has loved them? 'Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate'. How can our concern for the needy around us be compared with the loving mercy of the Father who 'gave his own Son', that the world may 'have eternal life'(Jn 3:16). Perhaps it is because this Law of Love seems an impossible ideal that Christians rarely think of it as a practical way of life. As his true disciples, however, Jesus tells us that we must never turn away from this ideal; it must be the measure of our lives. In the presence of the mystery of divine love, we will certainly be humbled, as we reflect upon our own performance. But in today's gospel takes us beyond this: Jesus teaches us how we can put the Law of Love into practice – we should never set limits to the practical good will we have towards our fellow human beings: be they friend or enemy, likely to repay us or not, reasonable or unreasonable in their demands ... An impossible ideal it may still seem; but through the gift of God's own spirit, the example of followers of Jesus in every age is there to encourage us, as they gave their times a glimpse of what Jesus was really like. With them, the only reward we should seek is the joy that we share with our Lord, the joy of the selfless giver. And so Luke's presentation of the teaching of Jesus ends as it began, pointing the way to true happiness – in the gifts of God that will be ours when we identify with the generous ways of God, our joy will be 'a full measure, pressed down, shaken together and running.

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