

Jesus approached the question of just retribution with a surprising revelation of God's intention for how we should treat others, especially those who mistreat us. When Jesus spoke about God's law, he did something no one had done before. He gave a new standard based not just on the requirements of justice - giving each their due - but based on the law of grace, love, and freedom. These familiar lines from the Sermon on the Mount are essential parts of Christ's own description of our life-mission as Christians.

- "Eye for eye and tooth for tooth" was a practical way for the people of Israel to avoid getting caught up in escalating vengeance which was a huge step forward in morality for the tribes and kingdoms of the time! In today's First Reading we're reminded of one characteristic of holiness, in imitation of the Lord that boils down into not let anger take hold of the heart. The teaching is framed in the command of the Lord to be holy in imitation of him. He doesn't say not to get angry. He says not to let the anger into your heart. Holiness is not letting something upsetting seep into your heart and, therefore, into your love for the person who is upsetting you. If you need to tell someone that they've acted wrongly, it should be in a spirit of fraternal correction. Fraternal correction is helping your brother or sister see the wrong of something they've done for

their good. Grudges and a desire for revenge are a sign that you have let something upsetting creep into your heart and taint your love toward the person responsible.

- And the ways of dealing with wrongs done against you continue to be challenged in Jesus' words from the Gospel. He calls His disciples to go even another step further:
 - Not to get back what is owed after a wrong is done to you! But to give even more than was forcefully taken (eg. offer your left cheek; let him have your cloak; go the extra mile)
 - Not just to love your neighbour as yourself, but your enemy too!!
- In the first century Israel (or Judea) was an occupied country. The Jewish people were under Roman rule and were continually oppressed by the military power. Frequently the people of provincial towns like Galilee were beaten by soldiers (*if anyone hits you on the right cheek, offer him the other as well*)
The Romans would take what they wanted from whoever they wanted (*if a man takes you to law and would have your tunic, let him have your cloak as well*)
And if a centurion was tired of carrying his pack, he would grab a villager and order

them to carry it for him (*if anyone orders you to go one mile, go two miles with him*)

Jesus is encouraging His disciples to stand against oppressive powers, but in a whole new way! Without vengeance or violence, but with love.

And Jesus himself lived this way of life, even to willingly taking on the cross.

He is teaching us how to respond to **personal insults and humiliations**.

- It was humiliating and offensive to be slapped on the right cheek, to be forced to hand over a tunic to pay a debt, to be consigned to carrying a foreigner's pack in your own homeland.
- Jesus wants us to respond to personal insults with **grace, patience, and forgiveness**.
- He wants us to break the cycle of violence by not always insisting on getting our own way, but going **out of our way to do good to others**, even when they don't strictly **deserve** it.

That's what God did with us by sending Jesus to be our Savior, and that's what he wants us to do for those around us.

What makes a disciple of Jesus different from everyone else? What makes Christianity distinct from any other religion? It is *grace* - treating others, not as they deserve, but as God wishes them to be treated - with loving-kindness and mercy. Only the cross of Jesus can free us from hatred, revenge, and resentment and gives us the courage to return evil with good. Such love and grace has power to heal and to save from destruction. The Lord Jesus suffered insult, abuse, injustice, and death on a cross for our sake. Scripture tells us that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin and guilt. Since God has been merciful towards us through the offering of his Son, we in turn are called to be merciful towards our neighbour, even those who cause us grief and harm. His love conquers all, even our hurts, fears, prejudices and griefs.

Do you accept insults, as Jesus did, with no resentment or malice? When you are compelled by others to do more than you think you deserve, do you insist on your rights, or do you respond with grace and cheerfulness?

Overall the First Reading is calling the people onward to another level of maturity in life and faith, and then the Gospel shows Jesus taking even another step further.

Both are calling us on to grow in holiness.