

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

I read a biography recently.

It recounted the story of the author who had been a Christian lawyer in a Communist country.

She told the story of her experience in learning of the Christian faith and how it changed her.

She told of the sufferings, disappearances, and deaths that she and her fellow Christians endured. &

Because she often defended churches in court, she had been the target of an assassination attempt.

I appreciated reading this book because it gave a real-life example of our text today.

And that was good for me to think about, because what Jesus teaches here is really hard.

It's hard because it flies in the face of our natural instincts and inclinations.

It militates against our culture's convictions.

Instead of revenge, Jesus teaches us mercy. Instead of strong resistance, Jesus teach us "strong softness."

Instead of hatred, Jesus teaches us "reckless generosity" (Concordia Commentary).

He teaches us, as St. Paul said, how **to not be overcome by evil, but to overcome evil with good.** ^{Rom12:21}

Our text for meditation... as follows in Jesus' name:

[Jesus said,] "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you." (ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

Before we dig into what Jesus IS saying, I want to clarify something that He IS NOT saying.

When Jesus teaches, "**Do not resist the one who is evil**"

He is NOT speaking to police officers, military personnel, judges, or other such gov't officials about their duties for the public welfare of society.

Each of these has a duty to use their God-given authority, even the power of the sword, to defend and protect the lives and possessions and safety of others, just as parents also have this duty to protect the lives and well-being of their children.

In fact, the law that Jesus quoted, "**An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,**" Ex. 21:24-25; Deut. 19:21; Lev. 24:20 had been given by God through Moses for the judges to use in dispensing just retribution.

This legal code both 1) stopped the escalation of retribution as well as 2) treated all people equally, without respect of social or economic class, nationality, sex, or creed.

So when Jesus says, "**Do not resist the one who is evil,**" He is not speaking of our gov't.

Instead, Jesus is speaking specifically to His disciples, to those who called Him teacher.

He is speaking, then, to you who have been baptized in Christ... who call Him Lord, who desire to live according to the way of life as Jesus taught it and lived it.

In today's Gospel, Jesus says, **A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher.**

How true this is, so let us then learn from our divine Teacher this hard, but rewarding lesson.

Jesus begins our text saying, "**You have heard that it was said,**

‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’”

It would appear that the phrase had been taken into common use, not for judges and magistrates, but as a rule for personal revenge... which is how our sinful nature would love to take it ... as if it gives us license to exact our vengeance.
So I can justify myself if I slander someone who has slandered me.

But now Jesus was teaching them (and us) a completely different counter-cultural, counter-natural way. Using the authority He had been given by His Father in heaven, He continues,
“But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil.”

When it pertains to you, when you are slandered, when you’re cheated, when you’re hurt by another, ESPECIALLY on account of the Christian faith, but also for any reason, revenge is not the answer. St. Paul affirms, **Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”** Romans 12:19

Instead Jesus teaches us a better way than seeking retribution: responding with kindness.

Instead of seeking vengeance, Jesus says, **“Be merciful, even as Your Father is merciful.”**

Notice that He doesn’t say, just ignore offenses and act like they never happened, instead, He would have us act in a positive, loving way toward our adversary.

If this wasn’t difficult enough, it isn’t just loving actions, but also loving thoughts and motivations.

If someone sues you because you won’t decorate a wedding cake to celebrate their same-sex “wedding,” continue to sell them the usual dozen scones he orders, and do so without spite, but with kindness. If anyone strikes you with an insult, return a genuine compliment.

As I said, this is a hard teaching. It is not natural.

It is a learned response, taught and exhibited by our perfect Teacher.

The mercy that we show to others comes as a response to God’s mercy upon us.

It is to be the reflection of what you have received yourself from Him.

So it is good to see how Jesus fulfilled this, not only difficult, but impossible, task for you (on your account). And what perfect examples we have as Jesus suffered so intensely during His passion.

St. Peter pointed out in his 1st letter, **When [Jesus] was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten,**

but continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly. 1 Peter 2:23

When the Jewish soldiers forced Him to walk "one mile" to the house of Ananias, He went with them also to Pilate’s and Herod’s, and finally even to the cross.

When He was slapped in the face at trial, He turned His cheek

and lovingly gave the man an opportunity to check his conscience before he stuck again.

When His seamless tunic was taken and dispersed by casting lots, He gave up all His cloths, to hang on the cross while still seeking forgiveness for His executioners, just as He had also taught:

“But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...” Matthew 5:44

When in hatred they tried to take His life, He gave it up in love for them instead.

He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree,

1 Peter 2:24

that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed.

We see in His perfect life, the perfect example, & even BETTER, the perfect fulfillment of all He taught. On this weekend as we celebrate our freedoms, the Lord would free us from our bitterness & animosity,

and free us to love and serve our neighbors for their eternal good.

St. Paul taught the same thing: **“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”** Rom.12:21
“...if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink;”
In other words, **“Be merciful, even as Your Father is merciful.”**

I told you of that book that I read. It is called, *Saving My Assassin*. (By Virginia Prodan)
In it, the author recounts the many evils that Christians endured at the hands of the gov't and others.
One evening a man came into her office after hours and told her that he was sent to kill her.
She did not defend her self. She did not scream in horror, but instead told him about his Savior, Jesus.
Obviously, he did not kill her that evening. Instead, he left dumb-founded.
She did not know anything about him until decades later when he stepped into her office again.
Without spoiling the story too much, beginning with her confession of her Savior,
he not only became a Christian, but a pastor and his children also were serving in the Church.

It was a wonderful depiction of what St. Paul said in Ephesians,
**“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood,
but ...against the cosmic powers over this present darkness,
against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”** Ephesians 6:12
The author did not see her assassin as the enemy,
but as the blood-bought soul languishing in darkness just as she had been.

What a wonderful, refreshing story it was to read of Christians doing what Jesus directs here.
But the truth is that not all the stories ended this way... and this is where it gets really hard.
If you knew your sacrifices of mercy would end like this every time,
how willing would you be to offer them over and over and over again.
You would feel like your sacrifice was worth it.
But we are often tempted, even when willing to make such sacrifices, to calculate the impact.
If you don't consider it likely to have a good outcome, how often do you back away from it.
But the truth is that we will never know all the effects of the sacrifices of mercy that we make.
But don't let this discourage you.
For the author, she was constantly having to practice these sacrifices of mercy day in and day out.
And so when her assassin entered her office, her struggle against her sinful nature was lessened,
and God blessed her to **not be overcome by evil**, and through her **overcame evil with good**.
Romans 12:21

Yet again, we are taught that we do not live by sight, trusting the outcomes that we can see,
but we live by faith, trusting that the Lord will be merciful, as is His very nature,
and that He will bless the sacrifices of mercy that He leads us to make.
We, indeed, have a merciful Father, who **showed His love for us in that while we were still sinners**
(still His enemies, hostile to Him and His will), **Christ died for us.** Romans 5:8
And not only has He saved us from His wrath, but desires to use us as agents of His mercy
to save those around us.

Thanks be to God who has overcome the evil within us with His eternal good.

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Soli Deo Gloria