

Today we live in the world of war and violence, hatred and revenge. The technological growth of the mass media and communication has reduced the human relationship and dialogue between people. People living in the same house and the same apartment grow in hatred and revenge for one another, because they are not able to withstand injuries and insults caused by the other. True love, kindness and forgiveness have no place in the hearts of the people, but instead we see the selfishness, jealousy, hatred, intolerance and revenge. People tend to become so intolerant of others in the Christian community. But the Readings of today's liturgy tell us how our holiness needs to be shown in our lives.

The First Reading of today tells us: "Be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy." God alone is the source of all holiness. God's holiness consists of His unconditional love, mercy and forgiveness towards every human being. So it follows that in order to be holy, we have to be loving, merciful & forgiving to our neighbors – and this is what God wants us to be when He calls each one of us to be holy, to be spiritually perfect. The responsorial psalm says that our Lord is good and great in forgiving all our sins. If our God is good and forgiving, then we need to imitate Him in our lives. In today's gospel also Jesus too tells his disciples – "Be holy as your heavenly Father is holy." Jesus encourages his disciples to strive for perfection. In the 2nd Reading of today, in his 1st Letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul gives yet another reason for us to be holy. He says that 'God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.' Also the Church always teaches us the virtue of love and forgiveness. Even when one is forced to defend himself/herself, he/she must love enemies and pray for them. Even limited vengeance has no place for Jesus; he condemns even the mild form of retaliation: "You have heard that it was said – An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, offer no resistance to the one who is evil....". Similarly, in his teaching about love, Jesus says – "You have heard that it was said – You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

Jesus tells his disciples how their righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus is not asking us to do something impossible and unreasonable. He tells us to open our eyes and see the reality and discover the most sensible way of relating ourselves with the people around us as the children of God. Surely, acquiring holiness or spiritual perfection is never a one day job. We become perfect bit by bit, step by step, enduring suffering day in and day out. We have to keep striving and we have to keep hoping. The 2nd Vatican Council spoke about "the universal call to holiness." That is, holiness is a task and a gift extended not just to some special people in the church, but to all followers of Jesus. The early Christians had the virtue of non-violence and meekness that gave them the inner strength to endure the torture of persecution without renouncing their Christian faith or trying to fight their unjust aggressors. Non-violence and meekness is not a sign of weakness but of strength. It is not a sign of cowardice, but of courage. The virtue of non-violence does not mean that Christians must have a blind eye to abusive situations. On the contrary, it means that we must imitate Jesus who gave up his life, at the same time, condemning all forms of abuse or exploitation of the weak.

Jesus tells us that most excellent way to holiness is love. In love for God and neighbor is found the whole Law and the Prophets. Jesus did, not only preach and teach the people, but he himself lived them in his life. He loved everybody, was kind and merciful towards sinners, was full of compassion towards sick, suffering and downtrodden. He even forgave those who crucified him – 'Forgive them Father, for they do not know what they are doing.' He invites each one of us to do the same. Forgiveness is a decision not an emotion. It does not remember any bad memories of the past. It does not expect any excuses from others because to err is human and to forgive is divine. Surely it is neither an easy task nor an immediate gain. We need to endure and to persevere in our plight; but above all we need to depend upon God's grace. Jesus continues his teaching saying: " give to those who asks you, and to those who want to borrow from you do not turn your back." If we have the opportunity to do good, let's not miss it and do not postpone it to tomorrow what we can do today. Who knows, one day we may find ourselves in the same situation of need and then we may have to reap what we sow now. Let us then pray today that we through God's grace keep striving towards holiness, towards spiritual perfection by doing God's will in our life, so that Holy Spirit really dwells in us and that we truly become the children of God. Amen.