

**Third Sunday after Epiphany  
21 January 2018**

***“Be of one mind towards one another.”  
Rom. 12:16***

Today’s readings show the radical difference between the gospel message of Jesus and the way in which the world lives. Jesus taught all his followers the need for a life of charity and the practice of virtue. In today’s *Gospel (Mt. 8:1-13)*, we see how Jesus Himself exemplifies His great love for men by His compassion for the leper and the centurion’s ailing servant. Likewise, in today’s *Epistle to the Romans (12:16-21)*, St. Paul emphasizes the need for charity, especially towards our enemies. This was unheard of in the ancient world, and it is still not practiced in the world today: ***“Be of one mind towards one another.”*** Rom. 12:16 We also see in today’s readings, how much Jesus was pleased with the faith and humility displayed by both the leper and the centurion when they firmly believed that Jesus would aid them in their request. These readings are important teachings because they remind us of the need for charity toward one another and faith in Jesus who alone can help us.

***“Vengeance is mine...” Deut. 32:35***

In the *Epistle to the Romans* today, St. Paul reminds his followers of Jesus’ lesson on the need to practice charity even to one’s enemies. Jesus had said, ***“But I say to you, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute and calumniate you...”*** Mt. 5:44. St. Paul tells the Romans this same message: ***“To no man render evil for evil, but provide good things....Do not avenge yourselves, but give place to the wrath, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay says the Lord.’”*** Rom. 12:17-9 This was a far cry from the ancient traditions which said that one could return what was given to you--- ***“An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth...”*** Lev. 24:19. St. Paul is reminding his followers that Christians who believe in Jesus Christ must love their enemies and take no revenge on anyone who opposes them. Revenge is not for man to take! This is God’s domain as He alone knows who is evil and who is good, and He will ask all His creatures to render an account of their works. If men do not repent of their evil, they will have to endure the severe justice of God. This can be seen in what Jesus said would happen to anyone who causes one of His little ones

to sin; Jesus said, ***“But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it were better for him to have a millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.”*** Mt. 18:6 While God is all merciful, He is also all just, and those who offend Him and do evil to their fellow man will endure a most severe judgment. This is why Jesus asks us to pray for those who persecute us as they will have to endure the justice of God for their deeds. If we could see how the justice of God shall punish those who do evil (to us), then we would fervently pray for them. Jesus also warns us not to despise (hurt) them: Mt. 18:6 ***“See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you, their angels in heaven always behold the face of my Father in heaven.”*** Mt. 18:6 What are we doing to our little ones and those innocents in the world; we are murdering our babies with abortion, we are denying life for other brothers and sisters to our children with contraception, we are corrupting the morals of our youth with false teachings and misguided sex education, and we are denying our children the faith in a good Catholic family by not marrying and practicing the faith. The list could go on and on! Has there ever been such a sinful generation as ours is today? How severe will be the vengeance of God on the Day of Judgment towards our generation for the scandal that we have caused ***“the little ones.”***

***“Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”*** Rom. 12:21

St. Paul takes the essential gospel teaching of charity which Jesus had taught to its desired end of loving even our enemies: ***“If thy enemy is hungry, give him food; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing thou wilt heap coals of fire upon his head.”*** Rom 12:20 These ***“coals of fire”*** are what St. Augustine explains as ***“the violence of charity: Evil must be answered and conquered by good. By gentleness Christians must disarm anger, and by charity they must break down hatred. Against the violence of charity,”*** says St. Augustine, ***“the world is powerless.”*** (Msgr. Patrick Boylan, *The Sunday Epistles and Gospels,*” p. 75.) These are the ***“coals of fire”*** which one’s enemy will not be able to overcome. Fight hatred with charity. It is the same lesson that Jesus taught when He said, ***“But I say to you not to resist the evildoer; on the contrary, if someone strikes thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also...”*** Mt. 5: 39 Only those filled with the Spirit of Jesus can understand such divine wisdom.

***“Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.”*** Mt. 8:2

The leper in today’s gospel has the Spirit of Jesus because he firmly believes that Jesus can cure him of his leprosy. His faith and confidence in Jesus are rewarded: ***“And stretching forth his hand Jesus touched him, saying, ‘I will; be thou made clean.’”*** Mt. 8:3 We can certainly admire the leper who has trust in the goodness of Jesus by coming to Him even though he knows that, as a leper, all are advised to shun him as unclean. He goes to Jesus with great hope and confidence that He can make him clean if Jesus wills it. His trust in Jesus’ goodness is rewarded instantly!

***“Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant shall be healed.”*** Mt. 8: 8

Like the leper, the centurion also has great faith in Jesus. He also has great charity: he is not asking for help for himself but for his servant who is dying: ***“Lord, my servant is lying sick in the house, paralyzed, and is grievously afflicted.”*** Mt. 8:6. The centurion, even though he is a pagan, is also aware Jesus should not enter his house. He knows that Jesus, who is a prophet having great power with God, does not need to come all the way to his house and can cure him from where He is: ***“Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant shall be healed.”*** Mt. 8: 8 Jesus is amazed at the centurion’s faith and says: ***“Amen I say to you, I have not found such great faith in Israel. And I tell you that many will come from the east and from the west, and will feast with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, but the children of the kingdom will be put forth into the darkness outside; there will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.”*** Mt. 8:10-11. By contrast, the faith of the children of Abraham, who should know better, is so weak that they will not ***feast with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven....***” Mt. 8:11

***“Go thy way; as thou hast believed, so be it done to thee.”*** Mt. 8:13

Although Jesus says these words to the centurion, they also apply to the leper. Here we see how important it is to have faith in Jesus. Ironically, in today’s gospel the two men who have faith in Jesus are despised in the Jewish society, a leper and a pagan Roman soldier. There is a most important lesson for all of us who have been called

to follow Christ. We need to practice the same faith in God and charity to all or else, like the Jews, we will be excluded from the kingdom and be in the darkness outside ***“weeping and gnashing our teeth.”*** Mt. 8:11