

7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Year A February 20, 2011 – Fr. Gerald Haemmerle

I am sure that the majority of you watched the Super Bowl several Sundays ago, and also all the ads throughout the game. I am not sure many of you caught the interview with the president sometime that afternoon. Bill O'Reilly interviewed President Obama, and he asked him if it bothered him that there are people that hated him. He responded by saying that it does not bother him because those people hate an image of him that has been projected, but they don't really know him. Now you might agree or disagree with him. I think if the same question had been put to President George Bush several years ago, he could have given the same response. We demonize our enemies, and then we feel it is alright to hate them.

Let me give another example. Tony Curtis the movie actor died this past year, and one evening they showed some clips from some of his movies. One of them was *The Defiant Ones* which also starred Sidney Pottier, a famous black actor. It was released in 1958, it was in black and white, yes, they made films in black and white a long time ago. I was actually able to bring up some excerpts from the film on the internet, which helped refresh my mind. It is a story of a young white southern man and a young black man who are convicts, working on the chain gang. A truck they are on overturns, and the two of them manage to escape, but their wrists are bound together by a chain. They hate one another at first, all they can see is the color of their skin, and it is different. They are enemies. But if they are going to make good on their escape, they have to work together. Gradually they begin to know one another better, they see that there are many similarities, they are both young, they are poor, they want to be free, they have red blood, and so forth. They gradually become friends, and in the final scenes they are running for a freight train, Pottier makes it onto the train, and he reaches out to help Curtis, you see a black hand and a white hand grasping, but Curtis doesn't make it, and Pottier also comes tumbling off the train. In the final scene Pottier is holding an injured Curtis in his arms, and you hear the sound of the blood hounds approaching. Once they got to know one another, they could not hate one another. Once they got to know one another, they could love one another.

That was a rather daring movie for 1958, not everyone was comfortable with the plot. It was just the beginning of the civil rights movement. I remember, I am sure many of you remember the 60's and the efforts made to bring the two races together. Many a meeting was held, not always comfortable, sometimes there was tension, and problems were not quickly solved, but slowly we began to know one another a little better, we began to see similarities rather than differences.

Our gospel today is perhaps the most difficult gospel we hear throughout the year. Jesus tells us to turn the other cheek, to hand over our cloak as well as our tunic, to walk two miles rather than one, and he summarizes it by saying "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

How do we love our enemies? I would suggest that, whether we are talking religion or politics or race or status or anything else, when we stop demonizing the other and begin to know and understand the other, we open up the possibility of loving the other, of loving our enemy. In fact, when we get to know the other, we no longer have an enemy.