

Fr. Tim Ralston – Homily for Feb. 20, 2011

“Be perfect, just as your Heavenly Father is perfect.” Words from today’s Gospel. Words that we have heard before in our lives. Words that we have never been able to live up to. And the next time we hear these words come up in the cycle of readings for Mass, we will find ourselves in the same position.

Hopefully, we will have grown in holiness over that time, but we still won’t be perfect. So, then, why does Jesus demand of us something that seems so impossible? Is He setting us up for failure?

No, in fact, Jesus is using these words to help us succeed in the spiritual life. The fact that we are not yet perfect, and will not reach perfection in this life, means that there will always be room for us to grow; there will always be areas in our life that we can improve. So, if we remain mindful of this, we can continue to strive for that perfection, that holiness and sanctity, that the Lord is asking of us. The pursuit of perfection in the spiritual life will lead us to depend more on God and less on ourselves. The pursuit of perfection will lead us to seek the Lord’s grace and mercy, as we acknowledge our need for Him.

And just as attaining perfection seems impossible, so, even the pursuit of it will prove difficult. It will require of us actions and attitudes that we won’t like, actions and attitudes that are different from what the world expects of us, and different from our own inclinations. Because this pursuit of perfection will require us to follow the rest of the Gospel we heard today. It will require us to turn the other cheek, to love our enemies, and to pray for those who do harm to us. It will mean swallowing our pride, offering forgiveness to those who may not desire our forgiveness, and desiring the good of others, including our enemies, while we help them achieve that good.

Jesus tells us in the Gospel, “Do all of this that you may be children of your Heavenly Father.” He doesn’t say do this so that you may receive the praise and thanks of others. He doesn’t say do this in order to show others that you’re better than them or to make yourself look good. And He doesn’t even say do this in order to win over your enemies. He simply says, “Do this that you may be children of your heavenly Father.”

And I’ll conclude this homily with a poem written by Mother Teresa which I think sums this up nicely.

*People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centered. **Forgive them anyway.***

*If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. **Be kind anyway.***

*If you are successful, you will win some unfaithful friends and some genuine enemies. **Succeed anyway.***

*If you are honest and sincere people may deceive you. **Be honest and sincere anyway.***

*What you spend years creating, others could destroy overnight. **Create anyway.***

*If you find serenity and happiness, some may be jealous. **Be happy anyway.***

*The good you do today, will often be forgotten. **Do good anyway.***

*Give the best you have, and it will never be enough. **Give your best anyway.***

In the final analysis, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway.