

7th Sunday after Epiphany: Year C, 2/24/19; Gen 45:3-11,15; Psalm 37:1-12,41-42; 1 Corinthians 15:35-38,42-50; Luke 6:27-38

Many of you probably remember the day you got your first driver's license-I know I do. I remember the feeling of being empowered to be independently behind the wheel without the need to have a licensed passenger in the vehicle with me, as was the case when I only possessed what they called in those days-a Learner's Permit. Little did I know the learning was really just about to begin.

As a "newbee" driver I recall being somewhat inhibited in my exercise of confident driving thinking all the other cars on the road were obviously being operated by seasoned drivers with much more experience and thus it was not yet my place to be in any way aggressive in my driving style. I also don't recall noticing a high incidence of other drivers being discourteous or even reckless in their driving habits. Over time, however, that seemed to change. Now of days, it seems, I don't have to drive very far to discover that another driver or driver's method of driving involves a complete disregard to others and in particular-me. In these situations I often find myself immediately overcome by an initial feeling of annoyance, irritability-even anger. I have been a licensed driver now for forty-seven years and after hearing today's gospel lesson, according to Luke, it occurred to me I have had forty-seven years of training in learning how to 'turn the other cheek.' My guess is that many of you can relate.

Turning the other cheek in these instances is the choice Jesus would have us make as opposed to the other choice of submitting to a retaliatory reaction of some sort of road rage. The choice of turning the other cheek, of course, represents loving those who abuse you versus the choice of road rage which represents retaliation and a further act of aggression toward them.

Over the years, I believe, I have become increasingly more seasoned at turning the other cheek with regards to daily encounters with other drivers. I have found that it is, for me, a much less stressful outcome when I simply move over to allow an impatient person to pass or slow down to make room for some aggressively reckless person in an effort to give them a wide berth and a lesser chance of a collision with me or someone else. In so doing I routinely find myself in sort of a "bubble" between clusters of vehicles allowing me a period of low-stress driving as I await the inevitable group of vehicles behind me to make their way into my formerly calm piece of roadway. While I am certainly not perfect and am sure I am guilty of having been the source of annoyance, irritability or even anger to some other driver or drivers over the years I feel as though my good driving record and my perceived increased development of success in turning the other cheek in the midst of discourteous drivers leaves me feeling like I have learned to be a better, more Jesus-like driver over the last forty seven years.

We see a fine example of this concept of turning the other cheek in our reading from Genesis this morning. Joseph, in a reunion with his brothers, who had sold him into Egypt, kisses them, even weeps on them in a complete forgiveness and lack of retaliation for their former treatment of him

(especially in light of the power he's been given by Pharaoh) Joseph, further, I think, provides us with a fine example of what Paul is trying to convey to the Corinthians when he says, "What is sown in dishonor is raised in glory...it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power...it is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body." Joseph's forgiveness and disregard for the abuse bestowed on him by his brothers is an example of not just turning the other cheek, but of love and of a man borne in the image of dust, yet one bearing the image of a man of the spirit-a man of heaven.

This whole idea of turning the other cheek, of loving our enemies, of doing good to those who hate us, of blessing those who abuse us is what it means to be Children of God who is "...kind to the ungrateful and the selfish makes the sun shine on the evil and the good and sends rain on the just and the unjust." This radical, unearned grace from God is the essence of today's gospel. As God has put up with our ungratefulness and selfishness time and time again so we should strive to do the same for one another.

This is not to say that God is asking us to turn our backs on God's laws or injunctions which protect us against violent crime or self-defense against attack. No, Jesus' message to us in Luke's gospel is that the principle of turning the other cheek refers to non-retaliation to assaults against our own dignity.

Furthermore, the response of love to hatred just might serve to get someone's attention and offer us an opportunity to share the Good News of the gospel. This ability to respond with love in such an unnatural way suggests the supernatural power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

I believe we all have that power within us and need only become vulnerable to releasing it to enable us to be the true Children of God we all strive to be. In a few moments we will share in the consumption of that supernatural power of the Body and Blood of our Savior and be simultaneously empowered again by the indwelling of His Spirit.

Then, we can confidently walk out those doors into the world of abuse, hatred, dishonor and disrespect armed with an increased ability to turn the other cheek and mirror the same love God gracefully bestows onto us day after day, year after year. My brothers and sisters, we are the Children of the Most High, the Church, the Body of Christ in Los Osos, who are called out into the world to turn the other cheek and allow those whom we find it difficult to love or be around to see that we are willing to journey outside of our comfort zones and into their world long enough to show them they are not beheld as 'the others' but rather brothers and sisters whom we welcome into our family and thereby welcome into a comfort zone like we enjoy-one of family, one of trust, one of sanctuary-one of Love. AMEN