

HOMILY 7TH SUN OT YRA 2020

Mahatma Gandhi once said: “If all of us were to practice the eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth rule, the whole world would soon be blind and toothless.” I think that is true. There is something within us wants to retaliate when someone wants to hurt us. And in general, things tend to escalate. You do something to hurt me, I do something to hurt you back and it is usually something a little worse than you did to me. They of course you have to retaliate against me. This is the cycle of violence that only ends when one side is totally destroyed or one side decides they are going to stop the violence, forgive and get on with their lives.

In the Gospel we hear: “you have heard it said an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” That was actually written about 4,000 years ago by Hammurabi in ancient Babylon. It was part of the ancient Code of Hammurabi. It was written to limit the revenge. Before that time the punishment for everything was death. Death was probably too strong of a punishment for some offenses. Jesus tells us something different in the Gospel. “I tell you that if someone strikes you on the right cheek, offer them the other one as well.” Jesus opposes all forms of retaliation. He tells us to love our enemies. Love does not mean you have a warm fuzzy feeling toward someone. It means treating them with the dignity and respect they deserve as human beings. Love is as love does. It is about what we do.

But we do have this inclination toward retaliation. Don’t get mad, get even. We have to be very purposeful about resisting this inclination. When someone does something to hurt us, anger is a normal reaction. Something happens in our brain when we get angry while interacting with others that psychologists call diffuse psychological arousal (DPA). This results in tunnel vision and hearing. We become illogical and cannot listen or process logically. There is something very important about that 24 hour cooling off period. You should not act when you are angry because you are likely to do something you will regret because you are not thinking logically. An immediate reaction is rarely necessary, and usually we can wait longer than 24 hours to respond. This applies even more so to the internet and social media. Not only are we thinking illogically, we are likely to write things we would

never say to the person's face. Do not respond when you are angry but do not wait too long. Anger can take on a life of its own.

When we do respond, how should we respond? First of all, do not respond by email, or text, or on social media. Communication experts tell us that 80% of communication is non-verbal. With a written response there is a big chance of being misinterpreted. Face to face is best, by phone if that is not possible. If someone hurts us, we must respond to the individual. Our first inclination can be to discuss it with someone else. That may be ok if we want some advice, but we must talk to the individual. Say something like: "I do not think you meant to hurt me, but I was hurt when you... You are very important to me, I love you and I do not want this to hurt our relationship." Make it about you not about them. If someone tells us that we hurt them or we discover that we hurt them, the natural tendency is to give a bunch of excuses for why we did what we did. They may not be the best thing to do. If you know that you did something wrong a good response is: "I am sorry that I hurt you. Please forgive me. I care about you and do not want this to damage our relationship. I will not do it again. What can I do to make things right." If we did something wrong, I would leave off the excuses. If you do not feel that you did anything wrong, you can still feel sorry that you hurt their feelings. Sometimes that sorry can initiate reconciliation. About now you are probably asking: "What if the other person does not respond the way I would like?" If you treat people with dignity and respect they tend to treat you with dignity and respect. But we cannot control other people. We will know that we did the right thing. Leave the door open for the future and forgive them. Forgiveness does not depend upon the other person. We cannot change the past. Your choice is to expend all of that negative energy on anger and hate, or you can let go of it and move forward. Jesus said: "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. It is hard to stay angry with people you are praying for.