

Reflecting on Matthew 5:43-48

Versus 5:43-48 in the Gospel of Matthew seems pretty self-explanatory: Jesus calls on us to love our enemies. Love your enemy... A pretty straightforward message, right? It's easy to understand Jesus' message here, the really hard part is actually being able to practice it. I don't know about you, but if someone is intentionally making my life miserable, I find it very difficult to love them or to desire good things for them.

When reflecting on this Gospel reading, I thought it might be helpful to discuss a few ways that we can grow in the area of loving our enemies, as well as why it's important for us to do so. One way to love our enemy is to grow in love in general. There are many ways that one can grow in love, but the first way that sticks out to me is spending time with Jesus in front of the Blessed Sacrament and consuming Jesus in the Eucharist. The more time that we spend with Jesus, the more we consume Jesus, the more we become like Jesus. God is love, He cannot help but love. Jesus even loved the people who betrayed Him, the Roman soldiers who beat and spit on Him, who crucified Him. The more time that we spend with Jesus, and consume Him, the more that we will become like Him.

Another way that we can grow in loving our enemies is by praying for them as much as possible. I've found that when I consistently pray for those who have wronged me in the past, I cannot help but eventually start to root for them; most people want to see their prayers answered by God and come to fruition. Over time, we may begin to have empathy or positive thoughts toward those who have wronged us. It's also important to ask God for the grace to forgive our enemies as well. Without God's grace, we will be unable to do so.

It may take weeks, months, or even years before our prayers are answered, but when they are, we receive a great freedom that comes when the weight of resentment or anger that we may have towards an individual is lifted. It can also be good practice to go out of your way to interact with those whom you'd like to interact with least. Whether it be at a Church function, or some other gathering, if you see an open seat next to someone who you dislike, sit down next to them and be charitable. In psychology, this idea is called exposure therapy and can help us get over things that we dislike or fear.

Outside of the fact that Jesus is calling us to love our enemy, there is great importance in detaching ourselves from any anger or resentment that we have towards others. Anger or resentment that we have will act as a hurdle to our spiritual growth. The Devil is always looking for chinks in our armor, and he can do a lot of damage with the resentment or anger that we hold against those who have hurt us.