

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

The Sin of Enmity

“Everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgement”
(Matt., 5:21)

The moral law proclaimed by Jesus Christ is based on the commandment of love: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and soul... Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” Hence, it is a serious sin to disobey this commandment, not only with reference to the obligation to love God but also with reference to the obligation to love one’s neighbour. This is the significance of Our Lord’s words in today’s Gospel: “Everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgement.”

Of course, these words must be interpreted properly. Our Lord does not condemn just anger. He Himself manifested just anger when He drove the buyers and sellers out of the temple. If some modern parents were more inclined to show just anger toward their children when they misbehave, there would be less juvenile delinquency in our country. Again, that type of anger which consists in a brief manifestation of impatience or a slight show of temper which is uncalled for is not a serious sin, though people should strive to restrain this also.

But the type of anger toward our fellow men which Christ condemned so severely is that which consists in lasting, deep hatred. It is most unfortunate that many persons yield to this form of anger, which we call enmity. There are cases of enmity that lasts for years--sometimes between near relatives. People who meet daily hate each other so viciously that they will speak only in so far as is strictly necessary. They will strive to do each other harm, they will rejoice in each other’s misfortunes. How can such persons call themselves Christians, followers of the gentle and forgiving Jesus Christ? How can they say with sincerity: “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us?”

It is only natural that at times we should feel a sense of resentment when we are treated unkindly or unjustly by others, and we are not forbidden to manifest our feelings and demand our just rights. But this must be done without hatred of soul. When there is reason to believe that the person who offended us was not aware of what he was doing, we should be sufficiently magnanimous to forget the matter. Often the source of the resentment that divides people for years is a slight incident, not sufficiently important to arouse good Christians to a single burst of impatience.

Practical Application

If you receive any injury or insult from a fellow man, show the true Christian spirit by forgiving this person from your heart and by praying for him.