

Pastoral Reflection
7th Sunday in Ordinary Time

“So be perfect; just as your heavenly Father is perfect.” So Matthew concludes a series of specific examples of how a disciple is called to live the Beatitudes. “Be perfect” – the Greek word used is *teleios*, which means complete, having reached a goal, and fulfilled its purpose. The key to that perfection can be found in Leviticus 19: “Be holy, for I, your God am holy.” This is the purpose, the goal, for which we have been created.

Jesus gives several examples of how this holiness is lived out: offer no resistance to one who is evil, give over your cloak as well as your tunic, go the extra mile, and love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. We hear these challenges to go beyond the letter of the law and to love as God loves.

A difficulty of passages such as these has been that they have been misread and misinterpreted. Culturally they have been used to tell women and other subordinate groups to accept being enslaved, to submit to abusive husbands, to forgive their rapists, to comply with demands of male employers, and to maintain peace rather than cause upset by naming injustices. Numerous other examples of such misreading of the passages could be cited. Unfortunately, for some this submissiveness and even acceptance of violence against the person or group has become normative. This is not the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is not the call to be a “discipleship of equals.”

The message of subordination, submissiveness, and total giving for the use of another is often subtle. I remember the time I realized that the book being read to the children, *The Giving Tree*, reflected clearly the values of a disordered society and church. The tree, which is identified with female pronouns, is totally used up for the sake of the boy and his adventures. And this is seen as praiseworthy and expected. Her role is to give and give and give until she is destroyed. The boy benefits completely. This is not the Gospel of Jesus. Using people to benefit ourselves is not the Gospel.

We come to the Scriptures with our experiences and our biases. We are challenged to be open to hear the Word of God and to let it change us. Paul asks the Corinthians and us: *Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?* Be perfect. Fulfill the goal for which you have been created. Be holy, for your God is holy. This is the Gospel.

-Lynne Schmidt, SSND