

## Homily from Father Joseph Pellegrino

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7 Ordinary Time

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time: Making His Compassion Real

I want to begin today by telling you about Rocky Mallardi. It has been quite a while since Rocky Mallardi passed away, probably about twenty-four years or more. His wife, Mittie moved up to Tallahassee, and I believe she also has passed on. Rocky was a member of St. Ignatius for many years. He was the head usher at the 9:00 am children's Mass. I always found him happy and affable and extremely generous with his time to the parish. One Sunday Rocky came up to me and said that he wanted to apologize for his part in any bad feelings there may have been between us. I was shocked. I told him that I never felt any negativity coming his way and didn't mean to give him the impression that I was ever upset with him. He said to me, "Well, Father, I haven't always been the most supportive of you. And I think that it is really important that I apologize." I never saw Rocky like that before, and I realized that something was going on within him, so I just said, "Rocky, if there is anything you need to say your sorry for, I accept your apology," and I gave him a hug.

I later found out that for the two weeks before that, Rocky was seeking out anyone with whom he felt at odds and setting matters straight. It was not a matter of who was right or wrong. It was a matter of Christian charity and forgiveness. Mittie told me that the day after Rocky spoke to me, he went to his doctor for a full physical. He told the doctor that he felt his life was ending. The doctor told him that everything seemed fine. That night Rocky sat down in his recliner and passed away.

That Rocky somehow knew his death was coming is shocking. But even more amazing is the way he approached death. He was determined to die at peace with everyone in his life. Rocky is one of these stones here that is the foundation of St. Ignatius. He is also a man who took today's Gospel reading very seriously.

I think that of all the things the Lord asks us to do in our following Him, nothing is more difficult than the dictates of today's Gospel. "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. To the person who strikes you on one cheek, offer the other one as well, and from the person who takes your cloak, do not withhold even your tunic. Give to everyone who asks of you, and from the one who takes what is yours do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you." It is much easier to avoid sexual immorality than it is to avoid hatred, particularly when we have been hurt, but that is what Jesus is calling us to do. It is much easier to sacrifice our wants for the needs of others, than it is to avoid lashing out at someone who has attacked someone in our family, but that is what Jesus is calling us to do.

Hatred is destroying the world. Jesus came to give the world life. To follow Him demands that we fight off hatred in the world, beginning with that anger that is within us.

So your children or your parents, your exwife or ex husband, your boss or the people next door have made your lives difficult, even unpleasant. They have tormented you. We can all say that there are those people whose lives have made our lives difficult. And we think, life

would be so much easier if they had never existed. More than that, the very thought of the person makes our blood boil. And this nemesis is the person we are called upon to forgive.

Is the Lord asking too much? Is he expecting too much of us? No, He is only telling us to be forgiving so we can receive forgiveness. In the Gospel of Matthew, the Jewish people are told to be sincere or perfect as their heavenly Father is sincere or perfect. In the Gospel of Luke, that we heard today, we are told to be compassionate as our Heavenly Father is Compassionate.

That word compassionate means to be concerned with human welfare and the alleviation of suffering by being charitable, sympathetic, and merciful. We all live under the mercy of God. We are all dependent on His care, His understanding. We are called to offer that care, that understanding in the most difficult circumstance, to offer compassion to those who have assaulted us in any way whatsoever. We are told: "Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give, and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you."

When the ladies of Jesus' time went to the market place they would have aprons on over their clothes. The last purchase they would make would usually be wheat or some other grain or possibly flour. One measure of flour would be poured into the ladies' outstretched aprons. Now, how much that measure really was would depend on the merchant. The best measure would be one where there was no more room for any more flour. The measure with which your measure will in return be measured to you means that if our forgiveness is limited, so also will be God's mercy. If our forgiveness is complete, so also will be God's mercy.

Rocky really had it right. He wanted to be forgiven by God for the sins of his life, so he went about finding those whom he had to forgive as well as those whom he owed an apology.

So who is it that you and I still hold a grudge over? And why is it that we are allowing God's mercy to be limited by our anger for another person? And why is it that we feel justified in adding our anger to the sum of hatred in the world? Does that mean that we are to forgive and forget? Forgive, yes, but sometimes it is neither reasonable nor prudent to forget. We may need to remember for the sake of protecting ourselves or others from those who commit crimes against us. But we still need to forgive. Remember the story of the Prodigal Son. When he returned home, the Forgiving Father welcomed him back into his love, but he didn't give him the farm. The Prodigal Son had squandered his half of the farm. Whatever was left still belonged to the elder brother. But, as the Forgiving Father told his faithful son, "All that I have is yours, but your brother who was lost has returned and we need to celebrate his presence in our family."

Our participation in the transformation of the world into the Kingdom of God is dependent on our determination to put his love over our anger and our hatred no matter how justified we might feel. Anger and hatred only destroy, and they destroy the one who is angry, the one who hates. God does not want us to be miserable. He wants us to live and die in his love. We pray today for the courage to allow his forgiveness to transform the world.