Spirituality
Scripture for Life
Voices of Sisters
Spirituality



A supporter of then-former U.S. President Donald Trump and an anti-Trump demonstrator argue near the Wilkie D. Ferguson Jr. U.S. Courthouse, on the day Trump appeared for his arraignment on classified document charges, in Miami, Florida, on June 13, 2023. (OSV News/Reuters/Marco Bello)



by Sr. Mary M. McGlone

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Weren't last week's readings enough? "Blessed are the poor." Now, it's "love your enemies." That's pretty hard to take. So rather than jump straight into the Gospel, let's start with our gentle Psalm refrain, "The Lord is kind and merciful."

First of all, the word "kind." While we may have human images of kindness, in Scripture the word refers primarily to God. We find the prototype description of God's compassion or kindness in Exodus 22:26, which reveals that God always hears the cry of the poor. We can't get away from that simple fact — God pays special attention to the poor.

Like kindness, the word "merciful" also refers first to God. Once again, Exodus offers instruction, describing multiple attributes of divine mercy. In Exodus 34 we read that the Lord is gracious (kind), merciful, slow to anger, abounding in love and fidelity, loving for a thousand generations and forgiving.

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

February 23, 2025

1 Samuel 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23
Psalm 103
1 Corinthians 15:45-49
Luke 6:27-38

In the New Testament, the word for mercy, *eleos*, indicates an insatiable desire to relieve the suffering of another. Unlike pity, which looks on another with care, mercy allows the other to get under your skin such that you feel impelled to do something about what is plaguing them. It's a profound expression of love and solidarity, the choice to be in union with another. (These must be essential ingredients of marriage and friendship.)

In his book *Jesus Today*, Albert Nolan suggests that love of another recognizes that we are already one with each other, that all of creation is bound together and separateness is nothing more than a misperception of reality. As in God's kindness and mercy, love of another implies an ever-growing embrace of our oneness — not as a goal, but as a fact that orients our thinking and therefore, our actions.

When I recognize my oneness with others, Jesus' call to love the enemy takes a wholly (holy) new meaning. If I love my enemy as myself — even one who does me and/or others great harm — I will treat that person more like a wound than a threatening outsider. When we are wounded, we provide the maximal conditions for healing. So when someone seems to stand against me, the thing to do is pray for healing and avoid making the wound worse by irritating it.

Today, Jesus' instructions get a particular focus. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." In a globalizing world, that means that we approach others as mysteries to be understood. My tendency to give another what I would want misses the mark because it starts with me. Instead, in this age of synodality, we need to give one another something much deeper — the opportunity to be heard and understood as who they really are, not who we think they are. To treat them as they desire. (Do not judge.) It's easy to love those we understand, it's far more humanizing to learn to understand those who think differently from ourselves.

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Jesus promises that when we do these things, our "reward will be great." That isn't a promise of a high place in heaven, as if there were degrees of being in the fullness of God's presence. That's a promise that both we and society will change for the happier as we do these things.

We will grow beyond our drive for individual self-preservation, realizing that we thrive only when all thrive. Picking and choosing who we will love and who we will not is self-destructive behavior. Avoiding those we don't understand — or don't want to understand — is like living on junk food: We miss the nourishment of the diversity of who we really are together. We're stunting the growth we can experience when we allow ourselves to be drawn forth in new ways by different kinds of people.

Like the Beatitudes, which sound like an upside-down path to happiness, Jesus' ongoing instructions offer us an enigmatic invitation to human flourishing. As with the risk involved in any choice to love, moving beyond the backyard of our social, national, linguistic, racial and class circles give birth to new depths of being in us.

Because Jesus tells us to be merciful as our Father is merciful, we can believe that loving our enemies is possible. God's kindness and mercy are graces to which we can be open because God lives in us and with us. Faith assures us that we are capable of cooperating with grace. Today, we are invited to be among those who really hear what Jesus is saying.

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