

Love Your Enemies
02/19/17

The following story comes to us from St. Anthony Messenger Press. It seems that, late one night, a truck driver pulled into a roadside café for a little something to eat. As he was eating, three nasty-looking motorcyclists noisily strutted in and made their way to the bar. For some unknown reason, they gravitated toward the truck driver.

One poured a little salt on his head, another knocked his pie on the floor and the third managed to knock the trucker's coffee off the counter and into the man's lap. The truck driver got up, said nothing, paid his bill and made his exit. "That dude sure wasn't much of a fighter" sneered one of the cyclists. The waiter peered out the window onto the dark parking lot and answered, "He's not much of a driver either. He just ran over three motorcycles."

Lest you think I have completely gone off my rocker and am advocating the trucker's behavior, I thought it was a pretty good example of how NOT to react when confronted as he was. Personally, I'm not sure what I would have done in his situation. I'm pretty much a pacifist when it comes to getting into fights. I'm not all that strong and know I would lose every time. But I also know what Jesus teaches. He says we are to not only love our neighbors but now He's telling us to love our enemies and pray for our persecutors. What does that look like? Let me give you an example.

Suppose you had an only child who was run down and killed by a drunk driver. Would you be able to forgive the driver, plead with the court for clemency on his behalf, feel real warmth and concern for his future well-being?

Now suppose it's your child who runs down and kills someone else's child while legally under the influence. Wouldn't you want the aggrieved family to forgive your child and intercede with the court for clemency so his or her life would not be ruined? When we love the culprit, we can see good in him

and reason to forgive. Jesus asks us to love others. If we truly love them, perhaps we would more readily forgive.

Loving and forgiving are not always difficult because we have different circles of people in our lives. There's our families and friends. For the most part, loving them is the easiest, although I will admit from personal experience that there are families that never reconcile. My brother was the prodigal son story without a happy ending. When he came back from his life of dissolute living, my father was not willing to welcome him back and love him, let alone give him a ring, a robe and a fatted calf. So, not all families are picture perfect.

And then there's our neighbors and even our fellow worshippers. How about the neighbor that's up at 7 am on a Saturday, moving his grass? Or the neighbor with the loud exhaust pipes on his car or truck? The person sitting right here in this church who has a way of getting under your skin – am I really saying we need to love him, love her? No, it's not me that's saying it – it's Jesus Himself.

And lastly there's the folks that don't look like us, because they are of a different color or race or ethnic group. Nowadays especially, it's getting harder and harder to love certain groups who kill in the name of some cause or worse, some perverted notion of a god.

Remember back in June of 2015, when 9 members of a Methodist Church in South Carolina were shot while participating in a bible study? The shooter is a self-proclaimed white supremacist who was invited into the bible study by the very people he would later gun down. And how did some of the family members react? At his hearing three days after the shooting, they turned to the shooter and said "I forgive you."

Did that forgiveness mean they no longer hurt? Absolutely not. But what those people showed us is that God calls us to be perfect and holy. We are to set an example to those around us that loving and forgiving is not only the Christian thing to do, it's the right thing to do.