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In today’s Gospel from St Luke, Jesus presents a radical call to love, mercy, and forgiveness. These virtues stand in sharp contrast to common human inclinations. This passage, part of the “Sermon on the Plain,” echoes Jesus’ teaching on the Kingdom of God and its counter-cultural ethic. Here, Jesus invites His disciples to embody divine love by loving not only those who are easy to love, but also those who oppose, mistreat, or even hate.

Encountering Jesus, He commands His followers to love their enemies, a directive that challenges both human nature and social conventions. The concept of “enemy love” is central to the Christian understanding of holiness. It reflects the divine love that God demonstrates toward humanity—through the gift of redemption. St Augustine notes that loving one’s enemies is a direct imitation of God’s love, which is extended to all people, regardless of their worthiness. He highlights *“that the love Jesus speaks of is not merely an emotional sentiment, but a moral commitment to will the good of others, even when they do harm.”*  St Thomas Aquinas provides a theological insight in the “Summa,” and explains that the love of enemies stems from the theological virtue of charity, which binds us to love all human beings for God’s sake. By loving our enemies, we participate in God’s love, which is universal and unconditional.

Turning the other cheek is radical non-retaliation, the call to meekness and non-violence that breaks the cycle of violence and demonstrates the power of forgiveness over vengeance. St John Chrysostom elaborates: *“the act of turning the other cheek reflects a profound trust in God’s justice and mercy, and it reveals strength, not weakness. This radical non-retaliation is not a passive acceptance of evil but an active resistance to its spread by refusing to mirror aggression.”* In doing so, Christians bear witness to a kingdom that transcends the natural human desire for revenge. This non-retaliation is not about submitting to injustice but about overcoming evil with good, as St Paul echoes, *“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”*

The “Golden Rule,” found in various ethical traditions, is placed by Jesus in the context of divine love. Origen of Alexandria, a third century Christian theologian remarks on this universal call to love and do good is based on the conviction that all human beings are made in the image of God. Through the Golden Rule, he highlights that *“Christians are called to extend kindness not because of the worthiness of the recipient, but because of their inherent dignity as God’s creation.”* In this way, Jesus’ teaching transcends mere human ethics, rooting moral behavior in the divine image and the call to imitate God’s boundless mercy.

Jesus concludes with the exhortation to *“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”* Mercy, as Jesus presents it, is not optional but the hallmark of being a child of God. The divine model of mercy is portrayed throughout Scripture, especially in the Old Testament, where God’s compassion and patience with His people exemplifies His enduring love. Gregory of Nyssa, “On the Beatitudes,” emphasizes *“mercy is the perfection of divine love, and Christians, in imitating God’s mercy, participate in God’s divine nature.”*

Pope Francis, in his apostolic exhortation “Evangelii Gaudium,” also reflecting on the centrality of mercy in Christian life, notes that *“the mercy of God is not an abstract idea, but a concrete reality with which God reveals His love. By calling His disciples to show mercy, Jesus invites them to live in imitation of the Father’s love, which is patient, generous, and forgiving.”*

Let us take the action words of today’s Gospel—love, bless, give, forgive—and let them inform how we are to live in this world. I leave you with a quote from Johannes Jorgenson’s “Life of St Francis.” St Francis is speaking:

 *“As surely as you love the Lord and me, see to it that no brother in the whole world, no matter how badly he has sinned, is ever allowed to go away from you without forgiveness, if he asks for it. And if he does not ask for forgiveness, then ask if he does not want it. And if he comes a thousand times with sin, then love him altogether more than you love me, so that you may draw him to the Lord. And be always merciful to such persons.”*