

**Readings: Leviticus 19: 1-2 17-18, Corint5hians 3: 16-23, Matthew 5: 38-48**



**Fr Michael says:**

### **Love your enemies**

We are in for a challenge this weekend, with the theme of this Mass! Leviticus sets the scene – declaring we imitate the holiness of God when we fail to seek vengeance or carry a grudge. As God is holy, so are we! Here the love shown is restricted to the Jewish Nation, something Jesus will broaden dramatically! Paul gives us the basis for our response: respect for others is based on the fact we are ALL Temples of God! The Spirit is with each and all of us, to move us to unity. Hatred is insidious, dangerous; it needs to be handled with care. We keep it for causes that are unjust, intolerant: NEVER individuals. This approach is the key for Nelson Mandela’s success – despite 27 years in prison, when he had every reason for feeling bitterness and contemplate revenge – he left prison smiling, seeking reconciliation with the former leaders. “In prison my anger towards the whites was decreasing, whilst my hatred for the system grew. I wanted South Africa to see that I loved even my enemies, while I hated the system that turned us against each other. I saw my mission as one of preaching reconciliation, of healing old wounds and building a new South Africa. ” Hatred burns up a lot of energy – let’s use it for better things!

The “enemies” Jesus talks about are not necessarily those we meet in war; they can be people with whom we are quite close, who make life hard for us. Whom do we try to avoid; or find it hard to forgive; who can awaken in us feelings of unease, anger, or fear? The fact that we can be overtaken by these things is a good lesson in humility, it shows how weak we are – that often the “enemy” is within us rather than out there! This can provide us with the trigger we need to work towards freedom – as it is only the truth that can set us free! Our enemies are those WE hate! Jesus’ Command to love our enemies begins to make sense – non-violence is not an option for weakness or passivity: it means believing more strongly in the power of truth, justice and love – we respond to the worst with the best! Nelson Mandela suffered much and largely unfairly, yet he achieved the only triumph worth acquiring, that not being soured by his experience but living positively through it and being steadfast in this – he did not surrender his human dignity, but went on to invite his jailers to his inauguration as President of the new South Africa!

When Abraham Lincoln was running for president, he was being constantly attacked by a man called Stanton, yet when he won the election; it was to him that he turned to give a place in his Cabinet. We can ask why he did that and the answer became clear – he was the best man for that particular situation. Lincoln was proved correct in his choice, as Stanton gave him loyal service. He was asked one day why he did not destroy his enemies when he had the chance, to which he replied: “Do I not destroy my enemies when I make them my friends? ” Have we the courage to do the same sort of thing, should we need to do so?