

Measure for Measure

I have to admit that I'm not a very big presence on social media. I have a Twitter account that I haven't looked at since I created it. I do check Facebook most days, largely to see if there are any new granddaughter pictures and to wish people a happy birthday. Each week I record a reflection for broadcast on the Trinity Cathedral Facebook and YouTube sites. That's about the extent of my social media presence.

There are several reasons I'm not fond of Facebook, including its ads and its algorithms for deciding who and what I see. What rankles me most are the arguments that erupt over posts. Friendships have ended because of them, and I know of at least one person who left the parish over a Facebook exchange. Clearly no one is thinking of what we just heard from the Gospel of Luke.

Jesus says "For the measure you give will be the measure you get back." "Do to others as you would have them do to you." That last we call the Golden Rule, a way of treating others that's often cited as a teaching common to all religions, as though every religion is basically the same (which I don't happen to believe, by the way). When we hear Jesus say it, we get right on board. Unfortunately, we also tend to ignore what else he says.

He began with "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you." Why is it that many Christians rarely do these things? Instead, enemies are vilified. We judge and condemn others in spite of Jesus' injunction not to do so. Throughout our culture I see much more anger and hate than forgiveness.

This morning we heard the end of the Old Testament story of Joseph. It beautifully illustrates what Jesus was talking about. When the powerful Joseph finally revealed his identity to his brothers, they were greatly dismayed at his presence. They had hatefully sold him into slavery many years ago and probably thought he was dead. Yet here he was standing in front of them, second only to Pharaoh in Egypt. They had begged him for food in the midst of a famine. They had wronged him terribly and now he had absolute power over their lives.

Yet Joseph did not deal with them as they deserved but rather as Jesus would have done. Joseph's rationale for all that had happened was that God could now preserve his brothers and their families as well as many others who would have perished from the famine. Joseph was "kind to the grateful and wicked," as Jesus might say, a child of the Most High.

I really wonder how many of us would be like Joseph. Loving our enemies is hard work. Doing good and expecting nothing in return is hard work. It's the work of God, who is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Maybe that's the point. It's not our natural inclination, and we cannot do it without God's grace.

I've heard that some people prefer Instagram to Facebook because it doesn't provide the opportunity for rants. That sounds great but I haven't signed up yet. I'd rather read books than spend more time on social media. Besides, what I really need to work on is my own behavior. Fortunately, Lent is just around the corner – a time to take stock and rededicate myself to those spiritual disciplines that help me live a more Christ-like life. Think about what *you* want to do for Lent this year. Remember what Jesus said: the measure you give will be the measure you get back.