

Views from the Pews - Forgiving our enemies

Today's readings exhorting us to love our enemies and take up our own cross to follow Jesus are among the hardest of Scriptures to obey. Resistance to evil is instinctive, and often necessary to protect the innocent, but Jesus insists that the means of combatting it must not also be evil. Think of how rebellious, traumatised teenagers are simply made worse by harsh punishment, but they can find a Tough Love policy, linking unconditional love and acceptance with firm, consistent discipline, a form of treatment much more likely to get results.

The Parable of the Weeds does not say that pacifism is wrong, only that it will not necessarily make the world a better place. God does not punish people who engage in war – war itself is punishment enough. Neither will pacifists get priority of entry into the Kingdom, since everyone is already guaranteed that by Jesus' once-for-all atonement: "I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." John 12:32.

The problem of evil is one of the oldest puzzles in the book, and insoluble by the use of lethal weapons wielded for supposed righteous causes, whether national or personal. Forgiveness cannot eliminate evil either, but, by offering real love and understanding, some kinds of evil can at least be disarmed. Think of the dignity and pure virtue of those bereaved survivors of the mosque massacres who faced the terrorist in court and told him that they forgave his monstrous act. The pain for them remained, but the evil he caused was diminished by their costly goodness. Think of Jesus' first words as the soldiers hammered in the nails: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do'.

Yes, the last verse of the Parable of the Weeds, promising that the weeds will be pulled up and burned in the fire come harvest time, describes the ultimate triumph of justice. It emphasises a central but often hidden truth, that God will in the end deal with evil. But parable also teaches that the mysterious Kingdom of God is established and growing quietly in the real world that we live in. The weeds that cause us such pain, that we have to forgive as best we can, are never a serious threat to the coming of the Kingdom, because ultimately, they can't stop it.

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