

‘Be holy as I, the Lord your God, am holy’, we heard from the book of Leviticus in the first reading, and ‘Be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect!’, said Jesus in the Gospel reading.

What an extraordinary call this is, because it is impossible for us by our own efforts to be holy and perfect as God is holy and perfect, but the call from Jesus also suggests that we can indeed be perfect as the Father is, otherwise he wouldn’t have said it! Very recently Pope Francis also called for holiness in his apostolic exhortation called ‘Gaudete et Exultate’, or ‘Rejoice and Exult!’

However first let’s look at what does it mean that the Father is holy and perfect? According to the readings from Leviticus, St. Paul and Jesus it is all about merciful love. These two words are the key to understanding what God’s holiness and perfection are all about. If you want to be holy or perfect you need to ‘Love God, and love your neighbour as yourself, but with a merciful love’ (Lev 19:18). When you do so you are perfect and holy.

So love yourself with a merciful love, especially when you feel guilty, because that is the way the Father loves you. This is what today’s Psalm 102 says: ‘The Father is compassion and love... He does not treat us according to our sins... a Father has compassion on his sons, the Lord has pity....’ If God loves you this way should you not love yourself in His way! Looking at myself with the Father’s merciful love has helped me a lot ever since my teenage years.

Also love your neighbour as yourself. Today’s readings give you a lot of practical ways to show God’s love to others?

- You should forgive others willingly and not bear hatred for others (Lev 19:16; Ps 102) , or take revenge on others (Lev 19:18; Ps 102:8.10) because God loves us and is willing to forgive us (Ps 102:3.12)
- You should admonish sinners (Lev 19:17), because that is what God wants to do through you as He doesn’t want to lose anybody through sin.
- You should bear wrongs patiently without taking revenge, and without treating others the way they treat you (Mt 5:39): ‘offer the wicked man no resistance...’, says Jesus.
- Jesus also says according to Matthew’s Gospel in chapter 25 (vv. 31-46) that you should feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, visit the sick and those in prison, because when you do so you do it to Christ as well!

These are all the different ways of the so-called **works of mercy** which you see listed at the entrance of the sanctuary, and it is easy to do these works of merciful love for those you like. However love is perfect when you show it towards those whom you don’t like, even your enemies. Jesus says that the

Father's love is perfect and holy, because 'He causes His sun to rise on bad men as well as good, and His rain to fall on honest and dishonest men alike (Mt 5:44-45).' This is what perfection means, namely that your merciful love doesn't depend on how others treat you. The Greek word for perfection is '*teleios*', and it also means *maturity*. Someone recently asked what Christian maturity is. So this is the answer: Christian maturity is about loving others as God loves them: mercifully, with endurance, regardless of whether you like them or not.

It may sound quite difficult to have a merciful and enduring love for those who are really bad. Pope Francis reminds us of St. Paul's letter to the Galatians (5:22-23) in GE 14, that you cannot be holy by your own efforts: you must 'Let yourself be renewed by the Spirit...' (GE 24) if you want to be holy as your heavenly Father is Holy.