

7th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle C-2025

In today's Gospel, Jesus proclaims what is known as the "Golden Rule:" "Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you." We are called by Jesus Christ to treat others the way we want to be treated. In our own lives, is there a harmony or discrepancy between how we want to be treated and how we treat other people? Do we want others to respond to our phone calls, text messages, and emails in a timely manner? Do we want others to primarily focus on and celebrate our positive qualities? Do we want others to truly listen to and understand our thoughts and feelings? Do we want others to make us feel welcomed, included, and valued? Now for the \$64,000 dollar question. Are we that way with other people? If not, are we consciously aware of the contradiction, or do we believe we are above others and deserve special treatment?

Based on personality type, some of us are more naturally aware of the wants and needs of others. We are also

more in tune with how something may affect someone in a positive or negative manner. For some of us, however, these relational dynamics can be more of a challenge. Regardless of our personal inclinations, through the Golden Rule, Jesus is calling us to the ongoing conversion of being both mindful of others and mindful of ourselves. It is not an either/or. It is a both/and. We are called to see Christ in ourselves. We are called to see Christ in others. Some situations may require us to be more mindful of ourselves. For example, the need for balanced self-care through rest, exercise, a strong spiritual life, and nurturing relationships. Other scenarios may require us to be more mindful of others: an emergency situation, helping someone in their time of need, and faithfully taking care of and sharing family responsibilities.

Since the Golden Rule calls to us treat others as we want to be treated, we are better able to live it out if we love and respect ourselves. If we don't treat ourselves well through our thoughts, words, and actions, we will be less likely to do the same for others. We may be too self-absorbed because we are consumed by our own

thoughts and feelings. We may also pass on to others the negativity and harshness we feel about ourselves. The more we recognize, claim, and celebrate our own dignity and personhood, we are in a better place to live out the Golden Rule. Happy people tend to spread happiness to others. Hurting people tend to pass on their hurt if they are not aware of this emotional tendency.

Believe it or not, there is one area where an excessively literal application of the Golden Rule will work against us. I am talking about the five love languages. The five “Love Languages” are quality time, words of affirmation, touch, acts of service, and gifts. Following the Golden Rule, if our primary love language is quality time, our tendency will be to love others through a strong commitment to quality time. Even with the best of intentions, if their primary love language is different, they may not feel our love, because we are not meeting their emotional needs. It is best to love others in the way they prefer to be loved, even if it takes us out of our comfort zone. The relationship will truly be blessed and blossom, especially if they love us back in our own love language.

We are called to follow the Golden Rule daily, and in every situation, not solely in a selective manner or with ulterior motives. Our moral obligation to live it out is not limited to family and friends, when we are in a good mood, when it is convenient, or when we expect something in return. Jesus calls us to embrace the Golden Rule with everyone, including our enemies and those who persecute us.

In today's Gospel, Jesus reveals there is an even higher level to the Golden Rule. It is not limited to treating others as we want to be treated. Even more than that, we are to treat others as God has treated us. We are to imitate the love of God in our dealings with others. Jesus proclaims, "Be merciful, as your Heavenly Father is merciful." He also poses a three-fold question: "For if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them." "And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do the same." "If you lend money to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, and get back the same amount."

Jesus is inviting us to go beyond a tit for tat and purely reactive morality in our interactions with other people. If we are not willing to do so, we are no better than those Jesus pronounce as unjust, wicked, and sinners, in today's Gospel. Instead, He is calling us to love, mercy, generosity, and doing the right thing, regardless of the positive or negative response of the other person. In doing so, we are loving others as God loves them. This is the highest level of the Golden Rule to which we are all called to embrace and integrate in our daily lives.

What makes living out the Golden Rule so difficult is that when people hurt and disappoint us, we are tempted to shut down our hearts. In the attempt to protect ourselves, we can gradually become more self-centered and embrace the mentality that "I am only going to look out for myself." The Golden Rule gives us a new perspective grounded in empathy. Empathy leads us to not only look at the hurt from our own perspective. We strive to put ourselves in another person's shoes. We ask ourselves questions such as: Why are they like that? What drives their behavior? What is going on in their lives? Were they simply having a bad day? Were they

aware they were coming off that way? Is this out of character for them? Regardless of the reasons, we are to imitate God at the highest level of the Golden Rule and to pray for and do good to them.

Finally, we tend to become concerned and fixated on our own duties, goals, and dreams. The spirit of the Golden Rule reminds us that we are called to pursue these things, not only for our good, but the good of other people. For example, if someone is pursuing Medical School, their motive makes all the difference. Are they doing so solely to obtain and enjoy a certain lifestyle, or are they also genuinely motivated to bring comfort and healing to those they serve? The Golden Rule challenges us to always take God, others, and ourselves, into consideration. They are all interconnected and cannot be separated. The influence of the Golden Rule in our lives rises or falls to the degree we integrate all three dimensions into our relationships and service.

May the Golden Rule, with its layers of meaning, be “on our minds, on our lips, in our hearts,” and expressed through concrete action. If we do so, Jesus promises us: “Your reward will be great, and you will be children of

the Most High.” By the way, this is both a present and future reward! We get it now AND we get it later!