**First Reading Genesis 45:3-11, 15**

*Many years after being sold into slavery by his jealous brothers, Joseph reveals himself to them. Now the second-in-command in Egypt, Joseph reassures his brothers that God has used their evil intentions for good to preserve life during a devastating famine, and Joseph forgives them.*

3 Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?” But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence. 4 Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come closer to me.” And they came closer. He said, “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. 5 And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. 6 or the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. 7 God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. 8 So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. 9 Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, ‘Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. 10 You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children’s children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. 11 I will provide for you there—since there are five more years of famine to come—so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.’ ” 15 And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

**Psalm 37:1-11, 39-40**

1 Do not be provoked by evildoers; do not be jealous of those who do wrong. 2 For they shall soon wither like the grass, and like the green grass fade away. 3 Put your trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and find safe pasture. 4 Take delight in the Lord, who shall give you your heart’s desire. 5 Commit your way to the Lord; put your trust in the Lord and see what God will do. 6 The Lord will make your vindication as clear as the light and the justice of your case like the noonday sun. 7 Be still before the Lord and wait patiently. Do not be provoked by the one who prospers, the one who succeeds in evil schemes. 8 Refrain from anger, leave rage alone; do not be provoked; it leads only to evil. 9 For evildoers shall be cut off, but those who

hope in the Lord shall possess the land. 10 In a little while the wicked shall be no more; even if you search out their place, they will not be there. 11 But the lowly shall possess the land; they will delight in abundance of peace. 39But the deliverance of the righteous comes from you, O Lord; you are their stronghold in time of trouble. 40 You, O Lord, will help them and rescue them; you will rescue them from the wicked and deliver them, because in you they seek refuge.

**Second Reading 1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50**

*In the Apostles’ Creed, we speak of the “resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.” Using the metaphor of a planted seed and the story of Adam, Paul preaches passionately about the mystery of following Christ’s perfect life into eternity.*

35 But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” 36 Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. 37 And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. 38 But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. 42 So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. 43 It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. 44 It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. 45 Thus it is written, “The first man, Adam, became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. 46 But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual. 47 The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. 48 As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. 49 Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven. 50 What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

**Gospel Luke 6:27-38**

*Jesus continues to address a crowd of his disciples. He invites his followers to shower radical love, blessing, forgiveness, generosity, and trust even on enemies and outsiders. Living in harmony with God’s intent brings the reward of overflowing blessing.*

Jesus said: 27 “But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. 29 If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. 30 Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. 31 Do to others as you would have them do to you. 32 “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 34 If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. 35 But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. 37 “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; 38 give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”

**Sermon**

 In the first episode of the fourth season of the show Blue Bloods, Officer Jamie Regan gets a new partner named Officer Edit Jenko. On their first call, they are called to a scene to help 2 other officers pursue a man who had committed a robbery and fled. But shortly after they arrive, one of the officers was shot. She is taken to the hospital where she dies from her injuries. Later in the episode Officers Regan and Jenko were assigned to protection detail for the guy suspected of shooting their fellow officer because the guy, who had not yet been arrested, had received death threats.

 As they sit in their squad car on the street outside his apartment, Officer Jenko complains about having to protect the guy. She reminds Officer Regan about the phrase, “an eye for an eye,” which, by the way, is a misinterpretation of what it actually means when it appears in Leviticus. But Officer Regan responds, “leaves the whole world blind.” Officer Jenko reminds her partner that Gandhi, who was credited with saying this, was never a cop. A few moments later, Officer Regan spots the fallen officer’s partner and 2 fellow off-duty cops approaching the man’s apartment. Officer Regan has to go and intercept them, prevent them

from doing any harm to the man who allegedly shot and killed his partner. At first, Officer Jenko refuses to join her partner in confronting their fellow officers. But after a few minutes, she changes her mind and backs Officer Regan up. Later on, at the end of their shift, Officer Jenko apologizes to Officer Regan and says she didn’t know what to do, feeling that the situation wasn’t as black-and-white as she expected police work to be.

 Nothing in life is as black-and-white as we wish or expect it to be. Especially when we listen to the teachings of Jesus. “Love your enemies…do good to those who hate you…bless those who curse you…pray for those who mistreat you…do to others as you would have them do to you.” Does that sound strange? Does it sound difficult? Does it sound like a really dumb thing to do? If we’re being honest with ourselves, we should answer yes to at least one of those questions. This is VERY different from the way we naturally relate to those who are considered enemies, those who hate us, those who curse us, those who mistreat us.

 The first thing I want to make clear is, none of these teachings require an abused person to stay with an abuser. They also don’t require anyone whose life is in danger to remain in danger. Jesus is talking to those who are following him. In last week’s passage, Jesus taught that those who are treated badly for his sake are blessed. Jesus’ teaching here today picks up on the situation that his followers and he, himself will face…people who will opposed them, people who will hate them, people who will bear false witness against them. How will Jesus and those who follow him deal with the ugliness that humanity can throw at each other?

 Love…do good…bless…pray for…treat them as you would want to be treated. Now let’s be clear…this doesn’t mean going up to the enemy and hugging them or marrying them or even staying silent about the wrong they may be doing. What it does mean is refusing to act as an enemy, not giving in to hate, rejecting the practice of cursing another person, being unwilling to mistreat people. We have ample evidence that the human way is retribution, giving back what has been dealt to us. But the way of Jesus is the way of our God who created us.

 It is out of love for a rebellious humanity that God sends Jesus into the world. Through Christ’s life and death, God blessed us and dealt with us, not the way we deserved but the way that led to what is good, what is best for us which is relationship with God and salvation for our soul. What Jesus teaches here is for us to deal with those who opposed us no differently

than God deals with us. It is only by the power of the Holy Spirit of our loving, merciful God that we can even imagine to be able to live out these ways about which Jesus teaches today.

 It is only by God’s mercy. Because we’d rather see people squirm, eliminate them, compound the problem by getting them back 2 times worse than what we got. If we don’t already know this, we could discover plenty of stories of hate and retribution causing destruction to human life rather than bringing about life. And yet there are also stories in which Jesus’ ways of returning love, blessing, goodness, prayer…whether him or his followers…have had a transformational effect on humanity’s heart.

 A number of years ago now, early in Pope Francis’ tenure as pope, he went to a peculiar place to do the washing of feet on Maundy Thursday. Instead of washing the feet of other clergy, Pope Francis made his way to a prison and washed the feet of 12 people in prison. This was a drastic departure from tradition, though Pope Fracis has done a lot of that in his time as pope. But that act gave us all pause to reflect upon the fact that God’s mercy is for everybody, even those who have done a lot of harm. Those who might be lumped together in the “enemy” category…those considered criminals…had the mercy of God extended to them. We don’t know whether it was a transformational experience for any of those 12 people, but it certainly had an impact on all of us who heard about it afterward.

 Love your enemies…do good to those who hate you…bless those who curse you…pray for those who abuse you…do to others as you would have them do to you. This is not a teaching that we impose upon others…oh, that person needs to love their enemy. It is a way of life for each of us to reflect upon in our own relationships, for the purpose of how we interact with others in the world today. God, through Christ, showed us mercy by meeting humanity’s sinfulness and rebellion with love and forgiveness. If we think that we can love, do good to, bless, pray for our enemies by digging deep down inside of us, we are gravely mistaken. It is only through the compassion and mercy of God demonstrated through Christ at work in our lives that we are inspired to live out transformational compassion and mercy toward others. Amen.