

Father O'Connor's Homily for 23 February 2025  
Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time-C

1 Samuel 26: 7-9, 12-13, 22-23  
1 Corinthians 15: 45-49  
Luke 6: 27-38

George Jones [1931-2013] was a country music singer. During a concert in Nashville, for which people paid good money to attend, George Jones took one of his crowd-pleasing numbers and sang it in the voice of Donald Duck. And the boos from the audience all but drowned him out. The voice of Donald Duck was not what they wanted to hear.

Some people in Jesus' day were not happy with what they heard Jesus say. *"To you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."*

I am sure that when the people in the Gospel heard Jesus say these things, some of them came up with excuses as to why they couldn't do them.

Somebody put together a list of excuses called "101 Easy Ways to Say No." Here are a few of them. They all start out with "I'd love to, but..."

--I have to check the sell-by dates on my dairy products.

--I'm observing National Apathy Week.

--I need to study for a blood test.

--My chocolate appreciation class meets tonight.

Well, we can come up with all kinds of excuses too. But still, these are things that Jesus expects of us. And Jesus, being the Master Teacher, not only tells us what to do, but He also shows us how by His example.

We all need models for our behavior. But when what is expected by Jesus seems too much for us, we often excuse ourselves by settling for less. "Well, I'm not perfect. But I am certainly better than So-and-So is.

But Jesus points out that when we are judged at the end of our lives it will not be in comparison with our neighbors. Jesus says that His Heavenly Father *"is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."* And so Jesus will ask each of us at the end of our lives, "Did you live your life as I taught you and showed you how to live?"

Love is more than an emotion that we express on Valentine's Day. Love is a decision that we make and that we daily renew: to live as Jesus taught us to live. *"To you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."*

I am going to leave you with a story about two brothers who were both farmers, and their farmlands were adjacent to each other. They shared tools and farm workers, and they had gotten along well – until one tragic day. They had gotten into a terrible argument and words got very hurtful. And, as a result, they stopped speaking to each other.

One day, older brother answered a knock on his door. The stranger said to him, “I am a carpenter who needs work. Do you have anything for me to do?”

And older brother responded, “Yes, I do!” They went out into the yard and he told the carpenter, “My brother lives on the other side of this creek. It used to be a meadow and we traveled easily between our two properties all the time. Then we had a nasty fight. And afterwards my brother took his bulldozer and demolished the river dam, and now we have all this water between us.

“What I want you to do is to build a 12-foot-high solid fence between our two properties so that I don’t have to look at his house anymore.”

Then older brother went out of town for two weeks.

When he returned he didn’t see what he expected to see. Instead of a fence the carpenter had built a bridge over the creek. And there was younger brother on his side of the creek holding out his hand and saying, “Older brother, I can’t believe that you did this for me, after all the terrible things that I said to you. Can we get back together again?”

Then older brother and younger brother walked to the middle of that bridge, shook hands, and warmly embraced.

Older brother then said to the carpenter, “Can you stay a few more days? I’ve got some more things for you to do.”

And the carpenter replied, “I’d love to, but I have to go. I’ve got some more bridges to build.”

Of course, Jesus is the Master Bridge Builder [“Pontifex”] between us and God, and between us and others. As one wise writer put it, “Insecure people build fences and walls. Loving people build bridges.”

Jesus says some very challenging things in today’s Gospel: *“To you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.”*

Jesus not only tells us these things. He also shows us how to do them. When dying on the cross for us sinners Jesus said, *“Father, forgive them. They know not what they do” [Luke 23: 34].*

And what does Jesus teach us today? To work at building bridges to connect with others as brothers and sisters, rather than building fences and walls to exclude others as enemies.

Then Jesus adds, *“Do to others as you would have them do to you.... For the measure with which you measure will, in return, be measured out to you.”*