

Homily Outline for the 7th Sunday of the Year – Cycle A
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
February 19, 2023

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- I. This Wednesday is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent.
 - A. If we have not done so already, we should start thinking about what we hope to accomplish this Lent.
 - B. Today's scripture readings offer some suggestions for our reflection.
 1. In our first reading, from the Book of Leviticus (Lv 19:1-2, 17-18), the Lord asks Moses to deliver a succinct message to the whole Israelite community: "Be holy, for I, the LORD, your God, am holy."
 2. Lest we think that being holy is an impossible task, God gives some specific instruction on how to do that:
 - a. "You shall not bear hatred for your brother or sister in your heart."
 - b. "Take no revenge and cherish no grudge against any of your people."
 - c. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."
 3. In our second reading, from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians (1 Cor 3:16-23), we have another succinct message: "Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?"
 4. In today's passage from the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 5:38-48), Jesus goes beyond the command to love your neighbor and delivers His most difficult teaching of all: "Love your enemies" and sums it all up by urging His disciples to "be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect."
 - a. Again, the task may seem impossible, but we must remember that all things are possible with God's grace.
 - b. That is why we say our daily prayers, come to church, go to confession, attend Mass, and receive Holy Communion frequently, because doing these religious practices will bring us God's grace and help us to grow in holiness.

- c. When Jesus tells us to be perfect just as our heavenly father is perfect, that does not mean that we are called to be omnipotent, infallible, and flawless.
 - d. I understand the word “perfect” as coming from the Latin *perficio*, which means to do something all the way through, to finish a task, to be complete.
 - e. God the Father is in a perfect or complete relationship with His Son and their Holy Spirit.
 - f. Having been baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity, we are called to be complete Christians in relationship with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.
- II. Thus, our Lenten resolutions should be substantially different from our New Year’s resolutions.
- A. I once made a New Year’s resolution to run a marathon, resulting in my running 24 marathons over the next 24 years!
 - 1. That was a good personal achievement, and I raised over a half million dollars in charitable contributions by doing so!
 - 2. But our Lenten resolutions are not about personal accomplishments; rather they should have one singular goal: how can I grow closer to Jesus Christ?
 - B. So I invite you to reflect on these questions to help grow closer to Jesus:
 - 1. How can I grow in holiness?
 - 2. How can I love God and my neighbor more?
 - 3. Who are the enemies that I need to forgive and learn to love?
 - 4. What are some ways that I can remind myself every day that I am a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in me?
 - 5. How can I be perfect like my heavenly Father is perfect, that is, what do I need to do to be a complete Christian in relationship with the Holy Trinity, and not just be half-hearted in my commitment to Christ and His Church?
- III. Of course, all of this is possible only with God’s grace, so I conclude as always, with this prayer: May God give us this grace. Amen.