

Homily based on the readings from June 17, 2025 (2 Corinthians 8.1-9; Matthew 5.43-48)

As some of you may be aware, my secular employment – what I do for a living when I am not here with you all – is teaching mathematics. One of the lessons I learned early in my career is that is often much more challenging to apply a concept in a practical setting than it is to work with it theoretically. That is part of the reason so many people find word problems so frustrating. If this principle is true for calculus and differential equations, it is even more pertinent to the teachings and commandments of Jesus Christ. In particular, consider the directive from today's Gospel: "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." Most of us have probably heard this sentence so many times that it barely catches our attention. In principle, this requirement seems trivial; in practice, it is nearly impossible.

It is not difficult to extol the virtues of loving one's enemies from a safe distance. It is an entirely different story, though, when *we* are the ones

who have been injured or persecuted. We are no longer talking about an abstraction or a hypothetical situation – we are talking about our *own* suffering or, even worse, that of our *spouse* or our *child*. Whenever we encounter the *reality* of loving our enemies, the stakes are entirely different from when we are sitting comfortably in a pew.

The point, of course, is that this expectation applies to every single one of us – with no exceptions and no qualifications. The fact that it is so difficult is what makes it meaningful. As with all the challenges we face, Christ does not leave us to our own devices. Besides his own example, he has given us countless others: Saint Stephen praying for his murderers; Saint Maria Goretti forgiving her would-be rapist; Saint John Paul II visiting his attempted assassin in prison. Even if our own efforts seem much more modest in comparison, they are just as important to our own journey of discipleship. God does not always require grand gestures. In some cases, a simple and heartfelt prayer – on behalf of somebody who has truly harmed us – is all that God is expecting.

The most powerful tool for embodying the love of Jesus Christ will become available to all of us in just a few moments. Through the Holy Eucharist – the Bread of Heaven – God offers *himself* to his people as nourishment, as sustenance. Uniting ourselves *with him* is the only way to become truly *like him*. Relying on our own abilities, we would be doing well to love our neighbors, let alone our enemies. When we partake of the Body and Blood of our Risen Lord, we open up our hearts to *receiving* and – just as importantly, to *sharing* – the indescribable riches of his love and mercy