

Homily based on the readings from February 28, 2026 (Deuteronomy 26.16-19; Matthew 5.43-48)

Most of us, I expect, know quite a few people who are not particularly *opposed* to Christianity, but who do not really understand it either. They view our faith as one of *many* possible ways that a person might contribute to the community – akin to the Boy Scouts or the Rotary Club – as an opportunity for fellowship and service, but not any sort of life-changing commitment. From this perspective, Christianity is perhaps a meaningful supplement to our daily lives, but not the foundation upon which our entire *being* is built.

At least in today's world, this way of thinking is considerably more dangerous than either atheism or paganism – because it subtly undercuts the Gospel message without directly attacking it. If our faith is one of many valid options, then it is replaceable – and ultimately disposable. This sort of reasoning has been one of the *main* factors leading so many lifelong Catholics to discard their faith so carelessly.

Even for those of us who have *not* walked away from the Church, this perspective has the potential to do a great deal of damage. It is grounded in the idea that Christianity should be judged based on the standards of the *world*, rather than the other way around. At a fundamental level, as we heard in today's Gospel, the world's standards do *not* align with those of Jesus Christ.

Depending on the circumstances, the standards of the world can range from *terrible* to *not bad*. On the negative side, the world holds up such abominations as abortion, euthanasia, and so-called "gender-affirming care" as being virtuous or praiseworthy. On the positive side, the world often supports acts of charity and kindness, such as schools, hospitals, and soup kitchens. The point, though, is that the world never gets any better than *not bad*. As Christians, we all know that *not bad* is never good enough.

The principle that is mentioned in today's Gospel, that "[y]ou shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy," is a perfect example of a philosophy that is *not bad*. It is always good to love our neighbors – to take care of our family, to support our local community, to look out for the people around us. As Christians, however, we are called to do *more*. The template for our love is not the *worldly* model, where love is *limited* and *conditional*, but Jesus Christ himself – whose love constitutes the beating heart of the *universe*. Our love must be a reflection of *his* boundless and unquenchable love – a love that is poured out *equally* upon all God's children: "he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust." The whole purpose of our lives is to conform our love *completely* to that of Christ. As flawed and feeble human beings, this objective is clearly beyond our reach – but that is a cause for *hope*, not for *despair*. What Christ is *demanding* is that we reject the artificial boundaries that society imposes – which contain a version of love that is, at best, *not bad* – and that instead we aspire to the *infinite* and *unattainable* love that is the very *essence* of God's being.