



“FATHER FORGIVE THEM!”
LOVE YOUR ENEMIES!!

emotional reactions and feelings associated with certain individuals—our “enemies”—but this does not mean we do not love them. We, with the help of God, can love our enemies as an act of the will regardless of our emotions. For example, if we pray, “Lord, have mercy on this person, I pray they make it to heaven,” with this prayer we are loving our enemy—we are willing the ultimate good for them. Jesus teaches us to pray for our enemies and for all who do us any harm.

Secondly, we ask, is it okay to have “enemies”? Obviously, Jesus implies that we will have enemies when he asks us to pray for them! Who are our enemies? I think you could define your enemy as one who, either knowingly or unknowingly, opposes your ultimate fulfillment or your ultimate good. While it remains true that we must love our enemies—will their ultimate good—at the same time this does not mean we must keep company with them as though they were friends! In fact, love may dictate we stay away from them! St. Paul teaches, as did Jesus, there is a time to associate with sinners or unbelievers (e.g. Jesus ate with sinners; 1 Cor 10:27) and a time NOT to fellowship with them (cf. 2 Cor 6:14-18). In the Letter of Jude, the Bible mentions three levels of sinners and of the most vicious of all it says “have mercy [on them] with fear, abhorring even the outer garment stained by the flesh” (Jude 22-23). Notice, we must have mercy on all—we must love all—even if on an emotional level we “abhor” their conduct and rightly fear to be around them.

In conclusion, as Jesus clearly teaches, we as God’s children MUST love our enemies. Fortunately, He did not say we must “like” our enemies on an emotional level, nor did He say we must enjoy their company and spend time with them. The good Lord never demands us to do the impossible. It is possible for every child of God to love every human being. Love is a choice, an act of the will. If we want to “be perfect, just as our heavenly Father is perfect” we must choose to love all—even our enemies. Remember, our heavenly Father so loved every human being, that He sent His Son to sacrifice His life to save them. Yes, God desires all to be saved. Refusal to love is also a choice we are given—this choice will exclude us from the family of God. We all have our “enemies,” the crucial question is: how do we choose to respond to them: do we will their ultimate good, or do we will their demise?

Your Servant in Christ,
Fr. Terry Staples

In this week’s Gospel (Mat. 5:38-48), Jesus announces one criterion which separates the sheep from the goats—the “pagans” from the “children of your heavenly Father.” He says,

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same? So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5:43–48, NAB)

The truth of this teaching raises some formidable questions: what if I don’t love my enemy? What if I despise or dislike my persecutors or hold some people in contempt? Does this mean I am not a child of God? Is there any hope for me? I think we can clarify what Jesus is asking by looking at two questions: 1) What does it mean to love? 2) Is it okay to have enemies?

First, we ask, what does it mean to love? Perhaps the most basic definition of love is: to will the good of the other. Notice, love is a choice, an act of the will; it is not an emotion. We can have all sorts of unpleasant or even disgusting

