

Stuck in the Traffic
February 20, 2022, Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time
Gospel of Luke 6:27-38
Fr. John

I heard about a famous billboard that hangs along a congested freeway in a large metropolitan city that reads: 'You aren't stuck in traffic. You **are** the traffic!'

How true. We are, to one degree or another, part of the very problem that we often accuse others of. As the old saying goes: when we point our finger at someone else - we will notice that three of our own fingers are pointing back at us.

Admittedly, there are a few occasions when we are stuck in negative situations for which we bear no responsibility and within which we are simply the victim of circumstance and someone else's carelessness or dysfunction or sin. However, if we are really honest with ourselves we have to admit that we are usually complicit either subtly or crassly in the negative climate that often pervades our politics, our churches, the ecological problems of our planet, or most anything else.

The fear and paranoia that are at the root of so much conflict in our world are not foreign to us. We find it too difficult to accept those who are different from us. So what we hear is **not dialogue** but rather accusatory shouting from both sides of political, religious, and social spectrum. That's the kind of traffic that we are stuck in and we are part of it!

Too often we find ourselves wallowing in dualistic thinking. We speak about winners and losers. Nobody wants to be referred to as a 'loser' [and here we shouldn't relegate that merely to sports]. We want to be a 'winner' - usually at someone else's expense. We want the good to be rewarded and the bad to be punished.

That's what makes Jesus' teaching in today's gospel so radically counter to our normal human tendencies: 'Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who abuse you.'

What is the logic behind that? A friend of mine used to say: 'Yes - love your enemies and they will wonder what you're up to!' Last Monday was Valentine's Day but what if rather than giving flowers and chocolates to one's spouse or sweetheart, you sent a conciliatory note to someone with whom you totally disagree with over whatever issue - **now that would be unexpected!**

Indeed what would we be 'up to' if that were our approach? Well we might see it as a cynical tactic of instilling confusion in the mind of a perceived enemy. OR- it just might be the beginning of finding some common ground upon which to build a whole new and healthy relationship...a relationship that rests on mutual respect.

In our first reading, we read how David spares the life of King Saul, the very man, who, out of jealousy, is out seeking to kill David. His Lieutenant, Abishai's attitude is a familiar one. Having crept up on the sleeping Saul, he counsils David: 'Now we've got him where we want him - let me pin him into the ground with one stroke.' But David,

respecting Saul's kingship of Israel relented and later softened Saul's heart to the point of giving David his blessing. It didn't last of course. Saul would eventually cave in to his jealousy and resume his war against David. It might be a reminder that 'loving one's enemies 'may not always bring an end to the enmity in another person's heart. However, it can bring a sense of peace to the one shows mercy and forgiveness.

St. Paul, in the reading from the letter to the Corinthians, speaks about the nature of our humanness. He says that the Creator initially gave us our physicality and then proceeded to give us a spirituality. I think that the latter is still a work very much in process in terms of the development of our moral consciousness as a human race. Jesus gives us a premonition of the completion of that moral consciousness and what that looks like as a finished product.

Until then, we're still dealing with being stuck in traffic. But let us pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to keep nudging us along in the right direction on that congested highway, - as slow and painstaking as that might be.