

## **LOVE YOUR ENEMY?**

Today's collect tells us to love our enemy—to forgive those who wrong us and those who scorn us. My mother, who was a seminarian at St. Columba, told me early in my adulthood to respond to hate with kindness and love. Although this advice seemed irrational and impractical at the time, I have found over the years that a kind response to hate invariably puzzles the hater, usually leads to reconciliation and always leaves me at peace. This message underlying Christianity borders on subversive and counter cultural especially in the face of the so-called "War on Terror." In United States military, our infantrymen train with the mantra, "Kill the enemy," and we not only understand this mindset but also sometimes find ourselves condoning it. This paradox remains a challenge for us as Christians to take today's message and practice it in our lives outside of this Holy Place of St. Columba.

In Lent, we fast and pray in anticipation of Holy Week, The Passion of Christ and the Feast of the Resurrection. On the Cross, Jesus lovingly says, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." Jesus shows us by this Holy example how to love our enemy. Jesus commands us to love our neighbor and this new commandment applies even if our neighbor is our enemy. Is this hyperbole—an overstatement of the idea just to make a point? I think not.

The message in today's readings is a blueprint for living as a Christian in today's world, and in my experience it works. Some say, "Things are now different than they were when Jesus commanded us to love our neighbor!" I agree. *Things* are different now, but that is not the issue. The issue is whether *we* are different. I say that we are not different. We are no different than those who said to Pontius Pilate, "Crucify Him!" *We* are the ones who cried out for the release of Barabbas.

Just as Jesus loves and prays for us sinners, let us pray this Lent for those who wrong us and for those who scorn us, and let us love our neighbor—even if he is our enemy. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, we pray. Amen.

*This homily was preached by Howard Hill of St. Columba's Episcopal Church in Washington, DC on February 22, 2008.*