Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time: 2/19/23—9:30 and 11:30 AM

I don’t know how many of you have been watching the episodes of The Chosen, but it’s a very creative and powerful rendition of the life of Jesus by the filmmaker Dallas Jenkins. If you have not, may I be so bold as ask that you be sure to do so. Year Three of this series is now complete, and each year has been a truly wonderful portrayal of the life of Jesus and his apostles. For those of you who are not familiar with it, you will find a link to The Chosen in my parish-wide email this weekend. Please give it a try. With Lent beginning this Wednesday, this would be the perfect time for us to view The Chosen’s 24 episodes. Again, please give it a try. They are really something!

I mention The Chosen today because in one scene of one of the earlier episodes we see Jesus calling Matthew the tax collector to follow him. When Jesus does so, the character playing Simon Peter protests. Matthew is hated because, as a tax collector, he is an ally of the hated Romans. When Jesus calls Matthew, Simon Peter protests by saying to Jesus, **“This is different!”** Jesus then responds to him saying, “Get used to different.” In today’s Gospel Jesus says the same thing to us, **“Get used to different.”**

Just a few moments ago, we heard these **extremely challenging words**, ***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.*** What does Jesus mean when he refers to the rain and the sun? The rain and sun are indiscriminate and generous. We don’t see rain falling only on certain people and not others as if some had clouds over them and others not, the same with the sun. Jesus is calling us to be as indiscriminate and as generous with our love as God is as indiscriminate and as generous with the sun and rain. In other words, like with Simon in The Chosen, Jesus is calling us to be different! **But how can we get there?**

As one who is just as susceptible to anger as all of you, I have three suggestions to offer you which have helped me. **First,** I would suggest that each of us regularly take time to remember the worst sin he forgave us. Often we try to run from our sins or to bury them deeply, but how can we express God’s own indiscriminate and generous love unless we are grateful for God’s own indiscriminate and generous love for us? **Second,** I would suggest that we keep in mind the living miracle that is the person standing in front us at any moment. This suggestion is especially convincing for those of us like me who are fascinated by science. I recently came across a very interesting website titled **“92 Amazing Human Body Facts.”** Did you know that messages from the brain travel along nerves at up to 200 miles per hour, or that the human brain contains 86 billion nerve cells joined by 100 trillion connections, more than the number of stars in our galaxy, or that, if our DNA were uncoiled, it would stretch 10 billion miles from Earth to Pluto and back? These are but three of those 92 amazing facts meaning that there are another 89 left. In other words, each human being is a living miracle whom we are called to honor and love indiscriminately and generously as the rain and sun are indiscriminate and generous. A **third** suggestion I would offer to you are these words from Mother Teresa. She spoke of the other person as being ***“Jesus in disguise.”*** She also said that, ***“If we recognize [Jesus] under the appearance of bread, we will have no difficulty recognizing him in the disguise of the suffering poor.”*** Would it be so difficult to love indiscriminately and generously if we would remember that the other person, especially one getting under our skin, is simply Jesus wearing a mask?

I am sure we have all heard the quote by Albert Einstein that ***“The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.”*** We all say that we want better families, better neighborhoods, better cities, better countries, a better world, and even a better Church. If so, then why are we doing the same thing over and over by seeking “**an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”** and by **“loving our neighbors but hating our enemies”?** By doing so, aren’t we “***doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results”***? Maybe the better and wiser and more effective way to go is to follow Jesus’ words today: ***When someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one as well*** and ***Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.*** Isn’t any other way we may try to live “insanity"?