

“Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go for two miles.”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Once upon a time, a new patient walked into the office of the famous psychiatrist, Dr. Smiley Blanton. The patient noticed a copy of the bible on Dr. Blanton’s desk. So, he said,

“Don’t tell me the great Dr. Blanton reads, of all things, the bible.”

Dr. Blanton said,

**“I not only read the bible, I meditate on it.
It’s the greatest textbook on human behavior ever written. If people followed its teaching,
a lot of psychiatrists could close their offices and go fishing.”**

*What did Dr. Blanton mean? How is the bible a textbook on human behavior?
How are its teachings a guide to psychiatric health? (Huh—not yet!)*

One insight into these questions is found in today’s Gospel, which I/deacon just read to you from St. Matthew. There, Jesus tells his disciples:

“Don’t take revenge on someone who wrongs you.”

Like a good teacher, Jesus then goes on to give an example of what he means. He says:

“If one of the occupation troops forces you to carry his pack for a mile, carry it two miles.”

Now, to appreciate our Lord’s example, one needs to know that Roman occupation-forces held a kind of life & death power over Jewish citizens.

For example, if a Roman soldier tapped a Jewish citizen on the shoulder with his sword, the citizen had to do whatever the officer commanded him to do.

In other words, Roman officers could commandeer Jewish citizens just as police officers, today, can commandeer our vehicle if they need it in an emergency.

For example, a Roman officer could order a Jew to carry some object for him one mile. Recall—Simon of Cyrene. A Roman officer commandeered him to carry the cross of Jesus. ^{Mk.15:21}

It is in the light of this Roman law and its attending applications that Jesus tells his disciples:

“If one of the occupation troops force you to carry his pack (the legal) 1 mile, carry it 2 miles.”

**‘Why did Jesus give such strange advice?’ you ask.
Well, at last ...I am glad you asked that question!**

*The answer is clear...but, to get to that answer,
we have to go back to Dr. Blanton’s statement about the bible. Remember, he said:*

“If people followed its teachings, a lot of psychiatrists could close their offices and go fishing.”

When Jesus tells his disciples to walk 2 miles, he is saying, in effect:

**“Whenever the Romans press you into service, don’t let it anger you.
Don’t let it fill you with hate or resentment.
Don’t let it destroy you!”**

You see, when people hate and resent their, so-called, ‘enemies,’ they end up actually hurting themselves far more than they would ever hurt their enemies.

A wise man once explained it this way:

“When we hate our enemies, we give them ‘power-over-us’—power over our sleep, power over our blood pressure, power over our anxiety and, generally speaking, power over our good health and happiness!

Our, so-called, ‘enemies,’ would dance for joy if they knew how our hatred tears us up.

You see, our hatred is not hurting them in the least. They’re not even aware of it!

But (& there’s that proverbial ‘but’), **it only turns our days and nights into a hellish turmoil.”**

In other words, the only way the bullet of hatred and resentment can hurt our enemies is if it passes through us first—the epitome of the two-edged sword! The ancient Greeks used to say:

“The wise man will always suffer wrong ...rather than do wrong.”

On the other hand, a response of kindness to one who wrongs us, helps, not only us, but also the other person. A man tells this humorous story on himself.

Once upon a time, during the evening rush hour, I was running to get in line for a bus. Suddenly, a large woman shoved in ahead of me, nearly knocking me to the ground.

In mock-apology, I said to her, **“Pardon me! I didn’t mean to smash into you like that.”**

The woman’s reaction to my insincere apology was amazing. She really thought I meant it.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” she said. **“How can you be so kind to me after I was so terribly rude to you?”**

I was totally confused, caught off-guard, and didn’t know what to say. For the moment at least, the woman was totally transformed. I gathered my wits enough to mumble something like,

“It doesn’t hurt to be nice to people.”

Later, riding home on the bus, I felt humiliated and embarrassed by my pettiness and insincerity. I prayed, silently:

“Lord, what are you trying to teach me from all this, today?” The answer came back:

“My son, I’ve been trying to tell you—and, people like you, for centuries—that love will always release a chain reaction of love... maybe not immediately, but, with persistence, eventually.”

The man began to see that responding with love, will release love where it is most needed. When we respond with love, we stop the chain reaction of evil and replace it with the chain reaction of love. We know what a cancer hate can be within us and the effect it can have on our physical and mental health...how it can rob us of peace of mind, inner tranquility, and even sleep.

So-o, we come back to Dr. Blanton’s original statement:

“If people followed the teachings of the bible, a lot of psychiatrists could close their offices and go fishing.”

I sum up the teachings of today’s scriptures with these words of St. Paul’s to the Romans:

“Do not let evil defeat you; instead, conquer evil with good.” Rm. 12:21

I now conclude, asking our God for the grace that we all may live-out these words of Jesus:

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you, and pray for those who mistreat you. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not condemn others and God will not condemn you; forgive others ...and God will forgive you.” Lk.6:27-37

May Almighty God, our Abba, bless you, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.