

13 June 2026 - Monday of the 11th week, even-numbered year

1 Kings 21:1-16; Matthew 5:38-42

cheek

Turn the other

This Gospel passage brings to mind a scene from the life of Mahatma Gandhi. The event took place towards the end of Gandhi's life. India had just gained its independence, but it was already divided into two countries: India itself, a Hindu country, and Pakistan, a Muslim country; and a civil war was raging in the main cities between Muslims and Hindus. Gandhi began a fast, deciding not to eat anything until peace was restored between the two factions. It was then that a man of Hindu faith came to Gandhi. He was desperate, convinced that he would be damned forever because he had killed a Muslim child. He had killed him in revenge because Muslims had killed his own child. Gandhi then told him what he had to do to avoid damnation. "Go," he said, "find a child of the same age as the one you lost, adopt him and bring him up as your own child. But above all, take care to choose a Muslim child and bring him up as a good Muslim.

Even if Gandhi were not a Christian, it would be hard to find a more authentic application of Jesus' message in today's Gospel.

After more than two thousand years of Christianity, there is still war in every corner of the globe, and it is often waged by Christian countries, or at least millions of Christians are involved. But, above all, we have our little private wars. It may be a clash that lasts a few minutes or a conflict that lasts a few days. It can also be a tension that lasts a few years. The command to turn the other cheek is no more reasonable today than it was in Jesus' time, or was for the last two thousand years. But it remains the only way to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect, and therefore the only way to enter into eternal life.

The source of interpersonal tensions, like that of all wars, is that we forget that we are possessed by the Truth and we claim to possess it. We think we are the only owners of truth, of God, of justice. We are always tempted to return to the morality of the Old Testament, which embodied a territorial religion. God was conceived as the god of a people, of a land. Of course, there were other countries and other peoples who had their own gods; they were at most tolerated if we were not in open conflict with them.

The great world wars of our time and many other conflicts have shown us the destructive power of all forms of racism and nationalism. Any

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limitation of love to spatial limits, through walls, whether material or otherwise, is a recrudescence of the polytheism of Old Testament times, which limited the gods to specific territories. The political world of recent years has revived this ancient polytheism and, as Christians, we have a duty not to allow ourselves to be dragged down by this mentality.

The worst form of idolatry, however, is probably that of turning one's own desires and pursuit of personal satisfaction into idols. The example of King Ahab - in today's first reading - who had Naboth murdered because Naboth would not sell him the vineyard he had inherited from his fathers and which therefore had a value to him other than venal, is extremely wicked and cruel; but don't we often find the same attitude in relations between countries? And even, albeit in a less violent and much more subtle way, don't we sometimes find it in our everyday relations with our brothers and sisters?

Let us ask the Lord for the purity of heart that will enable us to see God in every person and preserve us from any failure to love our neighbour.

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