

7th Sunday of the year A
Samuel Hakeem

Lectionary 79:

Lev 19:1-2, 17-18

Ps 103:1-2, 3-4, 8, 10, 12-13

1 Cor 3:16-23

Matt 5:38-48

Possible preaching themes:

- The Gospel challenges us to end violence by refusing to retaliate. Such a move requires some form of reconciliation.
- Fear is a powerful motivator but can lead to effects worse than the thing feared. Jesus challenges us to love our enemies, which begins by setting aside fear of those who are different.
- What is the “perfection” of God? Is it a perfection of self-image, or a perfection of love of others?

Possible scientific resources:

- “Post-Conflict Affiliation by Chimpanzees with Aggressors: Other-Oriented versus Selfish Political Strategy”
<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0022173>
- Fear leading to psychogenic illness:
<https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJM200001133420206>
- Models of valuation and the Rescuer Task with the L’Arche Community:
<https://youtu.be/vmFLEgMz3c?t=3166> (link begins at the 52:46 mark of the video)

Possible preaching outline (following the 3rd them and 3rd resource above):

Models of valuation:

- In economics, the total value of the system can be defined as what I have, plus what you have. What I have and what you have are not *linked* to one another; rather, they are independent. My wealth does not depend on yours.

- To be perfect is to maximize my value with no concern for yours.
- This might be true in economics, but is it the best model for social interaction and wellbeing?
 - Is my comfort, safety, self-worth independent from yours? What about my holiness?
- Might there be a different model of valuation—one in which my value is not independent from yours, but the two are rather linked together? Might my well-being depend on yours?
 - This question has been studied by sociologists in a variety of experiments.

The “Rescuer Task” is one such experiment:

- The subject of the experiment is an observer of a simulation, who is given \$60 in real money.
 - The observer sees a “victim” who has \$30 stolen by a robber. The observer has an option to give 0%, 25%, 50%, 75% or 100% of their own money to the victim
 - If they give money, it increases their chances of being discovered by the robber and losing their whole sum of money
- The experiment is run 30 times, with the victim having some money stolen each time and the observer given the option to share money with the victim. At the end of the experiment, the observer leaves with their resultant amount of money.
- The results of the Rescuer Task experiment often fit the “additive valuation” model = what I have and what you have are not linked.
- However, certain groups show results which may fit a mixed-valuation model. L’Arche is among those groups.

L’Arche <https://www.larcheusa.org/about/> is an approach to communal living, founded by Catholics, whose communities are made up of adults with and without intellectual disabilities, living together.

- A values-based community, where people learn to see the goodness in others, as well as our interconnectedness as human beings.
- L’Arche participants tend to give more money overall than other participants, and more of them choose to give 100% of their money to the victim.
 - L’Arche members seem to understand that their value and well-being is linked to that of their neighbor’s, regardless of who that neighbor may be.

Today’s Gospel challenges us to perfection. But what is perfection?

- It’s easy to fall into the trap that perfection is making sure that *I* am as good as possible, that *I* make *myself* good, virtuous, holy.
- But how does this Gospel passage speak of perfection?
 - Resisting the temptation toward violence
 - Literally going the extra mile
 - Helping those in need
 - Loving all—even your enemy

- The perfection of our heavenly Father calls us out of ourselves and into relationship with others
 - Not a perfection which can be achieved or attained alone
 - I cannot be perfect when I harden my heart toward another, people in need are at my door, or when I am incapable of seeing each person as my brother or sister
 - the perfection of our heavenly Father is a system of mixed valuation
- We can look elsewhere in the Gospel of Matthew for confirmation, e.g.,
 - Matthew 25:31-46: “Whatever you did for the least of my brothers and sisters, you did for me.”
- The Paschal Mystery is a story of mixed valuation: the God of infinite value is born into our world, suffers and dies for us, and is raised to new life, bringing us into that infinite value through grace. We are the Body of Christ, united to others through a bond of charity—the Love of the Holy Spirit.
- The grace received through this Eucharist that we celebrate equips us for perfection—but it’s not about us. We reach out with God’s love, drawing others into the Body of Christ, helping as Jesus helped, loving as God loves us.
- After all, heaven is not a limited reality—there aren’t a certain number of “salvation passes” for which we must compete. Heaven is a community of love, united to and centered around God.

In the eyes of many, the members of L’Arche would appear to be far from perfect

- Intellectual limitations and messy living situations. It includes men and women who, with patience, decide to insert themselves into these living situations
- Yet when it comes to love, and our interconnected well-being and value, our brothers and sisters in L’Arche have much to teach us about perfection.
 - It begins at home: they come to see each other as valued and loveable. But it doesn’t end there.
 - It’s the same for us—our striving for perfection begins with those nearest to us. But it doesn’t end there. Our value and perfection only grow when our love grows.
 - “Perfection” is no small feat. But with God’s grace, we can strive for it.

Tags: L’Arche, disabilities, interconnected, love, perfection, valuation

About the Preaching with the Sciences Initiative

A primary way Roman Catholics explore their faith and nourish their spirituality is by participating in Sunday Mass and actively engaging in the homily. However, few preachers explicitly connect faith or spirituality with science. The Preaching with the Sciences initiative, made possible by a generous grant from the John Templeton Foundation, gathers scientists and leading homileticians to explore the positive contributions science can make to preaching, and consequently contribute to more contemporary modes of believing. Such contributions are grounded in the rich imaginations that scientists bring to their work as well as in scientific discoveries that have a potential for revealing religious truths and even shedding new insight on ancient teachings and beliefs.

With guidance from world-renowned scientists with differing areas of expertise, a select number of homileticians will draft homily outlines for preaching key Sundays and feast days across the 3-year lectionary

cycle. Over 100 homily outlines will highlight some of the way's sciences and the contemporary search for religious meaning can interface. These free homiletic resources have the potential to influence thousands of preachers seeking help each week in crafting sermons and helping to shape a scientifically informed religious imagination among future preachers.