

# Walking in the *Foot Prints* of Jesus

*A Discipleship Journey*



## **Sermon on the Mount**

Week 15

Active Love

Matthew 5:43 - 48

### Opening Prayer:

Falling In Love

Prayer of Pedro Arupe, S.J.

Nothing is more practical than finding God,  
That is, falling in love in a quite absolute, final way.  
What you are in love with,  
What seizes your imagination,  
Will affect everything.

It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning,  
What you will do with your evenings,  
How you will spend your weekends, what you read,  
Who you know, what breaks your heart,  
And what amazes you with joy and gratitude.

Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything.

### Reflection

We have now arrived at possibly the hardest but most rewarding of Jesus' teaching.

*You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy."  
But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you  
may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; .....*

*You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

Matthew 5:43 – 48

In last week's reflection, instead of revenge against an enemy, Jesus demands we turn the other cheek instead. This week's passage takes this teaching even further, presenting the most radical, demanding, and truthful of all of Jesus' commands: love our enemy.

Traditional piety instructs us to love our neighbor, to love those who are like us: our friends, acquaintances, co-workers, and family members. While this practice is certainly praiseworthy, it can also be a “path of least resistance”. Loving those we already like keeps us in a small world of warm fuzzies and inoculates us from the daring world of real love. In the words of St. Augustine: “Many have learned how to offer the other cheek, but do not know how to love him by whom they were struck.” Unless we come to feel actual love for our enemies, there is no real spiritual transformation.

Loving our enemy seems to be an impossible command until we understand that loving someone doesn’t require *liking* them; Jesus isn’t asking us to like everyone or to be best friends with those who hurt us. Love doesn’t mean we condone or approve of one’s behavior or actions or that we forget hurts or offenses. However, we also don’t have the right to disrespect or speak evil about the other. Rather, Jesus is reminding us that we are *all* created in the image of God and, as such, we are expected to honor God’s image in the other. Love means we strive to connect with and care about the indwelling Christ-presence in the other. Love the person; not the action.

Jesus’ teaching is not instinctual to us; we must *choose* to love. In an earlier reflection, we talked about the ripple effects our thoughts, words, and actions have on the world around us. We can choose to spread love or we can choose the opposite. Etty Hillesum, a young imprisoned Jew in Nazi Germany, writes in *An Interrupted Life*, “Each of us must turn inwards and destroy in [ourselves] all that [we think we] ought to destroy in others. And remember that every atom of hate we add to this world makes it still more inhospitable.” We must deliberately choose to be instruments of love and peace, first in our minds and hearts and then through our actions, in order to *be perfect, as our heavenly Father is perfect* and bring about God’s kingdom here on earth.

*Reflection Question:* Think of a person in your own life who you might find hard to love. What would help to extend loving kindness to that person?

### Closing Prayer

Speak to Jesus about what is on your heart, then rest in silence for a few moments listening for His response.