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Myra had worked for many years in a large, city centre office. No one had ever managed to get close to her among her colleagues and she had a way of quickly turning off anyone who tried to befriend her. Consequently whenever a new employee was hired, the warning went out, 'Stay clear of Myra'. Then a new employee, called Mary, arrived on the scene and despite warnings made a special effort to befriend Myra and sure enough it began to bear fruit. Myra was breaking out of her shell. She was communicating more easily and started making friends even among the other employees. Then, early one morning, the entire staff was shocked to learn that Mary had died suddenly the night before. When Myra heard the news she was devastated and kept repeating 'Mary was the only Christ I ever knew'.

Merely loving those who love us falls short of making us truly Christ-like. Does my love and concern begin and end with my own family leaving others on the side-line? If so, we earn no 'brownie points' since we're doing nothing exceptional. Jesus says: 'even pagans love their own'. But, by the grace of God, we can go beyond our natural likes and dislikes and love people at a deeper level. *I remember once seen graffiti on a wall which read; 'If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you'.* The evidence for a conviction is the stuff of today's gospel.

Do we pray for those who treat us badly or do we secretly wish them harm? Do we only give to those from whom we hope to receive? Jesus says even sinners do that much. Would we go that extra mile with people who have sometimes treated us badly or would we try and avoid them like Myra's colleagues did. Do we give without counting the cost or are we looking for little pay-backs along the way. God loves a lavish giver. Lent begins shortly and this sounds like an ideal time to discover how we measure up to today's gospel teaching. Judgement

after death will go a lot easier for us if our love delves into areas beyond our comfort zone, or is it a bridge too far.

Jesus forgave everyone from the Cross especially his persecutors. We heard today that God is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. If we lived a sordid sort of life and turn to God at the end of it, He will not hold our sins against us. When the 'good thief' on the cross turned to our Lord in the nick of time, the door of Paradise was flung open to Him with no question asked. Our frail human nature often inhibits us in our efforts to go beyond the call of duty. But, with God's grace, we can move beyond our natural inclinations and dip into reserves of love that we wouldn't have thought possible left to our own devices.

Jesus says that the amount you measure out is the amount that you will be given back. You may not be rewarded in this life but you will in the next, because pure unrequited love is the only thing that will count beyond the grave.