

## 7 (C)

*Myra, who worked in a large city centre office was hard to make friends with. 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. She began to feel more at ease even making friends 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 with tears '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? If so, are we doing anything exceptional? Jesus says: 'even pagans love their own'. But, by the grace of God, we can go beyond family ties and close friends and reach out to others who may feel cut-off and alone. *I remember once seen graffiti on a wall which read; 'If you were arrested for bearing the name Christian, would evidence of such come anywhere near finding you guilty.* The evidence is spelt out in today's gospel.

Do we pray for those who treat us badly or do we 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 are *hard work*, 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 see if we live the type of love enumerated by Jesus in today's gospel.

Jesus forgave his persecutors and tormentors from the cross. We heard today that God is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. If we lived a rebellious sort of life and turn to God at

the end of it, He will not hold our sins against us. When the man crucified with Jesus turned to Him nearing the end of his life he was promised a place in Paradise. 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.

I come from St Vincent's Parish. At one stage in his life the great St Vincent Himself was by temperament a very short-tempered person—even his friends admitted it. In his writings he said that 'except for the grace of God he would have been "hard and repulsive, rough and cross." But he became a tender and affectionate man, very sensitive to the needs of others. Pope Leo XIII made him the patron of all charitable societies. He didn't flinch from living today's gospel.

*Jesus says that the amount you measure out is the amount that you will be given back. It may not be returned in this life but will in the next, because pure unrequited love is the only thing that will count in the eyes of God.*