

Saint Aelred of Rievaulx (1110 – 1167) (From “The Mirror of Charity”)

Love of our enemies is the perfection of the love of our neighbours, No example more inspires us towards this than the wonderful patience of Christ. Though he was *fairer than the children of men (Ps 45.3)*, he offered his fair face to be spat upon by sinful men; he allowed the eyes that rule the universe to be blindfolded by wicked men; he bared his back to the scourges; he submitted the head which makes principalities and powers tremble to the sharpness of the thorns; he gave himself up to be mocked and reviled, and at the end endured the cross, the nails, the lance, the gall, the vinegar. Throughout all this, he remained gentle, meek and calm.

In short, *like a sheep that is led to the slaughter, and like a lamb that before its shearers he kept silent, so he opened not his mouth.(Isaiah 53.7)*

Who could listen to those wonderful words, so full of warmth, of love, of unshakeable serenity – *Father, forgive them* – and not immediately embrace his enemies with overflowing love? *Father*, he says, *forgive them*. Could this prayer be augmented by any gentleness, any love, it does not already reveal?

And yet Jesus did add to it.. It was not enough to pray for them: he also wanted to excuse them. *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” (Lk 23.34)* To be sure, they are great sinners, yes, but they are defective in judgement: therefore, *Father, forgive them*. Yes, they are crucifying, but they do not know who they are crucifying., because, *if they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory;(I Corinthians 2.8)* therefore, *Father, forgive them*. They think he is a lawbreaker, an impostor claiming to be God, a seducer of the people. I have hidden my face from them, and they do not recognise my majesty; therefore, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”*

In order therefore to love oneself, it is necessary not be corrupted by earthly delights. And in order to avoid this corruption we must extend all our affection to the gentle example of the incarnate Lord. Further, if we are to enjoy perfectly and gently the delight of loving others (and find our peace in doing so) we must extend our loving embrace even to those who hate us..

So, to prevent this fire of divine love from growing cold because of injuries received, let us keep the eyes of our soul always fixed on the serene patience of our beloved Lord and Saviour.