

Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Matthew 5, 38-48

³⁸ "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'^[h] ³⁹ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. ⁴⁰ And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. ⁴¹ If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. ⁴² Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. ⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor'^[i] and hate your enemy.'⁴⁴ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? ⁴⁸ *Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

We all know that being human means more than just learning to eat with a knife and fork, walking upright, or being able to read, write and do arithmetic. It is also about things like solidarity, responsibility for one another, respect and maybe even love. But even though everyone understands that, we often notice that problems arise precisely because there is a lack of solidarity and love. These problems, are "cracks" in our coexistence, that are steadily becoming bigger and bigger, so that politicians and society in general is worried that cohesion in the population is weakening. That is why we need laws to regulate coexistence. Laws are based on reward and punishment, similar to the principle of "an eye for an eye, or a tooth for a tooth" from the Old Testament. This system sometimes works better, sometimes worse, but we have become used to it. Our lives are often based on this concept of reward and punishment, and we know how to avoid punishment and receive rewards. So we base our life on these things.

You can imagine our lives as an old house in which we know exactly where the cracks and faults are. We know every dusty corner and every broken wall, but we still cling to this old house. One example is the dark cupboard in which we hide our anger and revenge, ready to bring them out when the moment comes. We know that revenge and anger should not be displayed so openly. They must first be kept hidden in the dark cupboard. And you must choose the right moment to unleash your righteous anger and hurl it at your opponents. We believe that the other person deserves it - it is their just punishment. But there are other places in my old house that I don't like so much. For example, there is a steel safe with a thick old key. Hidden in it are lots of files containing sins and mistakes. The sins of others are right at the front of this steel safe. That's why I always see these files first when I open the safe. That way I can always say that the others have sinned more. Or I can even say that the others actually caused me to sin too. They provoked me. Or aroused anger and rage in me. It is quite clear that this steel safe remains locked - the sins... mainly the sins of others remain unforgiven. Yes, that is what our imperfect house that we have grown fond of looks like. But we know that this old house that we have grown accustomed to is fragile. It is imperfect, and at some point we must separate from it and the hidden things must come to light. It is precisely at this point that Jesus steps into our self-built "house of cards" and turns everything on its head when he says: "But I say to you!" What Jesus is telling us is completely different from what we are used to in our old houses: "You must be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect."

We immediately notice that Jesus' demands are completely incompatible to our old houses, to which we have become accustomed to. Especially when Jesus gets practical and expects us to love our enemies. If someone hits me on the cheek, I should hold out the other one... I can

already imagine people mocking me: "That's ridiculous! You can't be serious about something like that." And Jesus goes even further: If someone wants to take my skirt, I should give him my coat too! "Where is the justice in that?" people ask. "As a Christian, I will soon be destitute and have nothing left myself!" And I should even give away my time: If someone wants to walk a mile with me, I should walk two with him. Jesus demands all of this from us - and says that we should be as perfect as God is. What Jesus describes here sounds like complete devotion and self-sacrifice for others. This message is hard to bear. It hits our ego, and it seems as if we as Christians are being mistreated and exploited without being allowed to defend ourselves. But that is not the main reason why this sermon of Jesus annoys us. What annoys us most is that this sermon calls our whole being and our human behavior into question. It particularly affects our old house of cards, in which so much hatred and bitterness is hidden. Our old house is based on the principle of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." Our human thinking works in a similar way: If someone does me something good, I should repay them with good - as the saying goes: "One hand washes the other." And if someone hates me, of course I should hate them too. But Jesus destroys this familiar house and builds something completely new: I should repay evil with good and love my enemies. That way we would be perfect! The word "perfect" already shows that Jesus is talking about something completely new and different here - he is truly talking about something supernatural. Jesus invites us to do just that. We should look to God. When we look at God, we see that his love was always for those who hated, slandered and rejected him. "When we were still enemies, God reconciled us to himself!" says Paul in the letter to the Romans. It is precisely this God that Jesus presents to us, whose love is always love for enemies. If we look at our own, often unjust lives, it becomes clear that we do not suddenly start giving away our things and forgiving others on our own. Jesus draws our attention to God: Look at God! What does he do? He lets his sun shine for everyone. God has not founded a heavenly department in which angels precisely dose the sun's rays depending on what people deserve them most. No, out of his infinite grace he simply lets the sun shine for everyone. Likewise, God also sends rain and his daily blessings for all people. To be honest: who in the world does not deserve to be called the enemy of God? Nobody! We all deserve this title through our big and small sins. But God does not bear a grudge against us, he loves us anyway. Not only does he bless us, but he also sends us his son so that we do not remain enemies forever. He wants us to be his children, to be close to him. Yes, God even gives us a completely new house - one without dark cupboards full of hate, envy and resentment. In this new house there is only love - love for everyone, even for those who do not deserve it at all. What power there is in God simply loving us humans! This power can only come from God himself. The ability to love comes from him, not from us. Just as God created the world, he also creates love in us humans.

If we believe in this God who gave his Son for us and poured out his Holy Spirit in us, then we understand that the double commandment of love - "love God with all your heart and our neighbour as ourselves" - is actually only one commandment. For whoever carries God in their heart will also love their neighbour through his power. We realize from this that Love is God's creation not ours!

Without this creative power, nothing works! God must first break through the hard walls of our hearts with his word. The baptismal water, combined with his word, creates a completely new reality. Only then, through God's power, can we approach our neighbour in a completely different way. I know that what Jesus is asking from us is a very difficult task. How can I love the person who tortured and even killed my family at home? How can I love the official who shows hatred towards me just because I don't speak his language? How can I love the people who cold-

bloodedly spread murder and violence in the world? What has to happen is really something new - something completely new! It is not part of our old life and, to be honest, not part of our present world either. The laws of this world are adapted to sinful humanity. Under these conditions, there must be punishment. Anyone who steals or breaks the law must be punished, otherwise the legal system of this world would no longer function and chaos would break out.

But Jesus wants to point out to us that the legal system of revenge is only temporary. It is not the last call. Something better must come, and we can really look forward to that and look beyond this temporary world to that one. Even if we are still imperfect. We Christians still live in this world too. If someone hits us in the face, we must and should call the police. But with everything, we long for what comes after. Again and again we will spontaneously reach out to the enemy and offer forgiveness. We can sometimes already sense forgiveness and love. We will never be satisfied with the old house of revenge, anger and retaliation, but look to the new house that Jesus has prepared for us. Amen