

Today, among other ways of behaving in accord with justice and charity, we heard from the Book of Leviticus: **“You must not exact vengeance.”**

In contrast, while preparing my homily for this Sunday, I was shocked to learn that there are several websites dedicated to revenge.

Two of these popular sites carry the names revengeunlimited.com and thepayback.com

No doubt, the creators of these websites constructed them as a joke.

These websites are not meant to be taken seriously.

The promotion line for one of these websites states: “Have you been wronged, mistreated, annoyed or ignored? Are you ready for some payback? Explore our site and find piles of good ideas and novelties.

Revenge Unlimited believes that there are people in desperate need of a good dose of humility...”

While both sites go on to “recommend good natured pranks and non-aggressive expressions of distaste,” it is curious that that they link revenge with having a laugh. I only wish we could.

Ask the police about how revenge drives so much domestic violence.

Talk to social workers about changing the culture of revenge in gang conflict.

Discuss revenge as a trigger for war with those campaigning for peace, and we soon discover that revenge has nothing to do with fun.

Revenge continues to wreak havoc on our world at every level.

And that’s why what Jesus said to us in Mass today about loving our enemies is so challenging and important.

First-century Palestine was a violent place. The Romans were a brutal occupying force.

The nation’s neighbours had unjustly invaded Israel several times, and even within Israel it seems that revenge was an acceptable way of reestablishing one’s honour.

Jesus quotes the Book of Exodus 21:23-24 which started this ball rolling; namely: that the Law of Moses required there be a **“life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.”**

This law is also repeated in the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

This law has come to be called the Law of Retribution. And as barbaric as this law sounds to us today, in its time it was a moderating influence in society.

In ancient Israel, before any courts were set up, personal justice could entail taking several lives for one life, and the torching of a house for the stealing of a sheep. Curiously, we have little evidence of the latter part of the law regarding eyes, teeth, and

hands ever being enforced.

The Israelites knew that these were figures of speech used to amplify the point.

The Law of Retribution established the rights of courts to moderate an overly revengeful response to crime.

Jesus inherits and understands this tradition, yet he clearly makes a break with it, and that's where we stand.

By contrast, Jesus says that His law is to forgive, love, and pray.

Speaking of prayer, the Psalms were written as songs to be chanted in prayer.

Among these Psalms is the Psalm we sang today in which the response is: **"The Lord is kind and merciful."** If we praise the Lord in our prayer for His kindness and mercy towards us, but fail to show kindness and mercy to people who

have harmed us, we are being duplicitous.

That is, we are saying one thing in our prayer to God, but doing another in relation to our brothers and sisters in Christ in our actions.

Some people even believe that justice can be applied to serious offenders by taking their life in capital punishment.

Like vengeance, this form of punishment is also against justice and charity, the reason for which is given by St Paul.

Today, we heard St Paul tell us: **"Didn't you realise that you were God's temple and that the Spirit of God was living among you? If anybody should destroy the temple of God, God will destroy him, because the temple of God is sacred; and you are that temple."**

To help us further understand what St Paul is teaching in these words, let me ask you a question.

Would you ever want to damage this church?

I am sure you have never thought of throwing a rock through the stained-glass windows, picking up the statues and smashing them on the floor, or bashing holes in the walls.

In the same manner, if we all looked at our brothers and sisters in Christ for who they are as temples of God,

we would never dream of taking out our anger on them. On the contrary, we would always be kind and merciful.

In other words, just as the Lord said, **"Be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy,"** we would do well to say, "Be holy, for your sisters and brothers in Christ are holy," for they, like ourselves, are temples of God.