You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth."
But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if any one would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; and if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you.

You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.
"BUT I SAY TO YOU."

This familiar phrase of our Divine Redeemer may seem to be an incomplete basis for a sermon; however, whenever He says, “But I say to you,” or “Truly, I say to you,” we must pay careful attention. He is about to teach something of the utmost importance. He is saying in effect, “This word of Mine is the last and immutable word from God; this word takes precedence over traditions and past spiritual teachings.

In today’s Gospel the Lord is addressing His followers of all times and places who imagine that being a Christian, a child of God, requires only following traditions of the fathers, of practicing human reasonableness. Perhaps some of us believe that reasonableness, even sweet reasonableness, is enough when dealing with God, our neighbors, relatives, friends and even our enemies. The traditions cited by our Lord are traditions of reasonableness. “Resist the one who is evil.” “Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” These actions are reasonable, and it makes perfectly good sense to resist the demands that evil-minded persons make on us and to love the loveable and those who love us in return.

However, today our Divine Lord commands us to act in a manner that human nature brands as unreasonable. Christ is calling upon us to be unreasonably good, and to practice a goodness that is divine rather than human. But of course He would do precisely that for throughout His ministry His purpose is to transform His followers from being merely human to being the divine children of God. Children of God are different and are unreasonably good because Christ became man that mankind might be like Him and follow Him in words and actions that are divine, not human. Bear in mind that the goodness that Christ commands is for our benefit. We must never forget how different we are by the grace of God.

He bids us, “Do not resist the evil one who makes demands of you!” Why? If we repay evil with evil we give in to the way of darkness and become no better than the evil person who makes demands of us. Christians are of the light not of darkness, and thus we are not really fit for the darkness of evil actions. If we respond to evil with evil and strike mightily the cheek of one who strikes us, or if we fight with evil intent to keep our possessions, or if with malice we refuse to go out of our way for an adversary we abandon the divine goodness in which the followers of Christ live, and we lower ourselves to the level of darkness and evil. As he so often does, St. Paul echoes this teaching in his Epistle to the Romans: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

In dealing with others let us remember these three truths: to repay good with evil is Satanic, to repay good with good or evil with evil is human, but to repay evil with good is divine. The latter is the way of Christ!

Make no mistake! Christians do indeed resist evil, but not with evil! The reasonable
world will consider our kind of resistance to be sheer folly. If someone strikes you, turn the other cheek? If someone sues to seize your tunic, let him take your cloak as well? If someone compels you to go a mile out of your way go for two miles? Pray for your persecutors? How unreasonable are such actions! Yet, when we resist evil with good we are the children of our heavenly Father, “who makes the sun rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust.”

If you are like me, you may be tempted to follow the reasonable way of the world and to resist evil with evil, at least with evil thoughts and intentions. Today Christ calls us from the darkness of the world to the light of His way and His kingdom. We all prefer the light, but let us recognize the hard battle necessary to remain in it. Let us also recognize that the world is too much with us, and that our battle with evil is doomed to defeat unless we invoke the grace and might of the Holy Spirit. It is only with God that all things are possible. It is only with the inspiration and guidance of the Spirit of God that we can order our lives and actions as God would have us do, and resist evil with good.

The Gospel continues with Christ’s comments on love and hatred, and they are also made for our benefit, not just for the protection of those who might become the victims of our hatred. Now, evil actions tend to be overt and visible! Hatred, on the other hand, is covert and begins in our hearts. It is reasonable to love our neighbors with whom we share similar opinions and enjoyments, and who love us in return. It would be difficult to find anyone who might disagree with that concept. Moreover, it is only reasonable that we show this feeling of love through loving acts and words, and it is easy for others to recognize this love.

Hatred often arises slowly from differences in philosophy and belief, from ignorance, from ill treatment, real or imagined, from opposing interests and goals, from jealousy, indeed from all sorts of causes. Sometimes we are not even fully conscious of the causes of hatred that linger in our hearts. But they are unmistakably present.

When hatred takes control of our hearts it seeks to move us to engage in some sort of hateful action. The goal of that action is to get even or to hurt or to show our dislike and contempt for another person. Sometimes the hater accomplishes the goal and the hated does indeed suffer. But frequently this is not at all the case. The hatred that is in our hearts is for various reasons often hidden, subtle or impotent. The hated may not even be aware of our feelings and is untouched by them. The hater, however, is always aware of his hatred and is hurt by it. Hatred gnaws away at our peace of heart, mind and soul, and it darkens our life. Love is from God because God is love. Hatred is of the devil and darkness, and it does grievous harm to the person who hates. Above all, those who hate deny their relationship with God whose essence is love.

Today Christ teaches us to deny hatred, to cast it aside whatever the initial cause of it may have been. How do you deny and cast aside the hatred that is in your heart? You forgive as Christ forgives. Remember His word at the moment He was being nailed to the tree of the cross. “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do” Remember
the petition concerning forgiveness in the Our Father. “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive whose who trespass against us.” As Christians we live by forgiveness, given and received. If we fail to forgive or are not forgiven, we cannot live in peace with God, with ourselves or with our neighbors. When we forgive, the hatred that haunts our hearts is banished. When we forgive we can pray for those who persecute us. Only forgiveness can swallow up hatred!

“But I say to you!” In His last and immutable word on the subject our Lord commands us to rise above the level of a merely reasonable religion!. He invites us to live a divine life like His, a life pleasing to the heavenly Father but folly to the world. This is His last word and it will never change. Amen!