16.6.20

Read: Matthew 5:43-48

Most of us will have seen the pictures and reports, from last weekend, of a black man (Patrick Hutchinson) carrying a semi-conscious white man to safety from amongst an angry mob. As it has been reported, Patrick Hutchinson was on the scene in peaceful support of the Black Lives Matter rally, whilst the white man was on the scene in support of a counter-protest group. They were 'enemies' in what had become a moment of serious confrontation between black and white.

And yet, the man's life being threatened, Mr Hutchinson (together with several black colleagues) rescued him from the mob and carried him to safety. So far as I know, we have no idea what, if any, conversations have taken place since then between the two men, but for all of us it was a vivid example of 'love your enemies' - the Good Samaritan story being played out in front of us. Would I have done that, even if physically strong enough, I need to ask myself. Would deep compassion for this 'enemy' have trumped all the various fears that would have been stirring in me?

Whereas in Mathew's gospel today we hear Jesus instructing us to "be perfect, just as your Heavenly Father is perfect", we read of him in Luke's gospel (6:36) telling us rather to "be compassionate just as your Father is compassionate". So we cannot begin to think about the meaning of *perfection* without serious attention to *compassion*, for they are so closely associated. Fr Flor McCarthy writes\*\*: *The one essential thing one would expect to find in a religious person is, I believe, the virtue of compassion. Without a warm compassionate heart one cannot call oneself a true human being, never mind a religious person.*

Compassion, like all virtues, is built up in the very small day-to-day moments of thinking, speaking and acting. We kid ourselves if we imagine we would be capable of doing something heroically compassionate when the time comes, if we do not make a real effort to be compassionate at every opportunity of each day; like the priest and the Levite, we too would pass by on the other side, no doubt with lots of rational self-justification.

Today is the feast of St Richard of Chichester, a local saint and a man of courage and real compassion for the poor and disadvantaged. We ask him to pray for us that we may be made perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect, perfect most of all in compassion for humankind, without any distinction.

\*\*Fr Flor McCarthy SDB - The Gospel of the Heart