

By [Dale J. Sieverding](#)

Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect and love your neighbor as yourself. These excerpts from the Gospel and the first reading are salient kernels of wisdom from the Lectionary for today. The Old Testament passage reminds us that God is not in some far off distant place but desires to be intimately involved with the people by making a covenant with them. The Lord God does not remain aloof in the vision of the Old Testament authors, but gets involved with the people by treating them as a partner. The Old Testament authors expressed the feeling of being far from God's presence when they experienced the human condition of sin and things not going well for Israel. The passage is from Leviticus, the book dealing with temple worship. The phrase: "I am the Lord" occurs as if it were a refrain throughout this part of the book. The passage is reminding the people that participation in worship (of the temple) implies a holiness beyond a simply legal and ritual purity. It requires an integrity that is suggested as normative for "the faithful."

The passage from First Corinthians speaks of the community as the "temple of God" where the "Spirit of God dwells." It is a powerful reflection on the care with which we should treat each other in the Christian community.

The Gospel is a continuation of the Sermon on the Mount. Now we come to the unique imperatives of Jesus: "You have heard it said...but I say to you..." The mention of the Levitical law may jar the contemporary listener, however, it provides the opportunity to hear Jesus' teaching on justice. The Christian is challenged to deliberately choose to act in a nonviolent way even toward those who treat you badly. The command is to turn the other cheek—intentionally not giving hate in return for hateful treatment. One commentator writes: "the point is not to seek to outdo others in perfection—be they pagans, sinners, exemplary brothers and sisters—but to be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect."

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