

THE QUESTION OF THE WEEK

“You have heard it said: An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.
But I say to you offer no resistance to one who is evil.”
(Matthew 5: 38)

Why? Why does Jesus say what he says in the quote above? Offer no resistance to evil? Just allow it? Doesn't that go against everything we understand about the negative impact of evil? Doesn't the Lord understand that to do nothing is to place ourselves completely at risk and then evil will triumph because we are not resisting, not fighting? How could the Lord possibly teach this? And who could possibly live this way?

Isn't it up to us? Isn't it our responsibility to resist evil in all its forms? Isn't the Old testament full of prescriptions to resist evil? What about the commandments themselves? Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal or lie or covet. Isn't the heart of the command then to resist evil? What could Jesus possibly mean here?

Let us acknowledge that for centuries reprisals and paybacks and vendettas were the rule of the day. And the payback was to be at least as negative as the original injury—and then some. It was that “and then some” which always served to escalate the original offense and prevent there being an end. The rule of an eye for an eye was designed to eliminate the “and then some” from the retaliation. Only a proportionate response is allowed. That actually was a pretty significant advancement in society for a long time and it came from the Hebrew mindset. It was called the Lex Talionis and it was designed to limit reprisals.

Jesus is going beyond that however. He is asking us to trust that his Father will deal with the evil if we do not resist it. Can we even do this? What kind of trust would it take? Is that what Jesus does at the end of his life? And is that what triumphs over the grave? That is the question of the week.