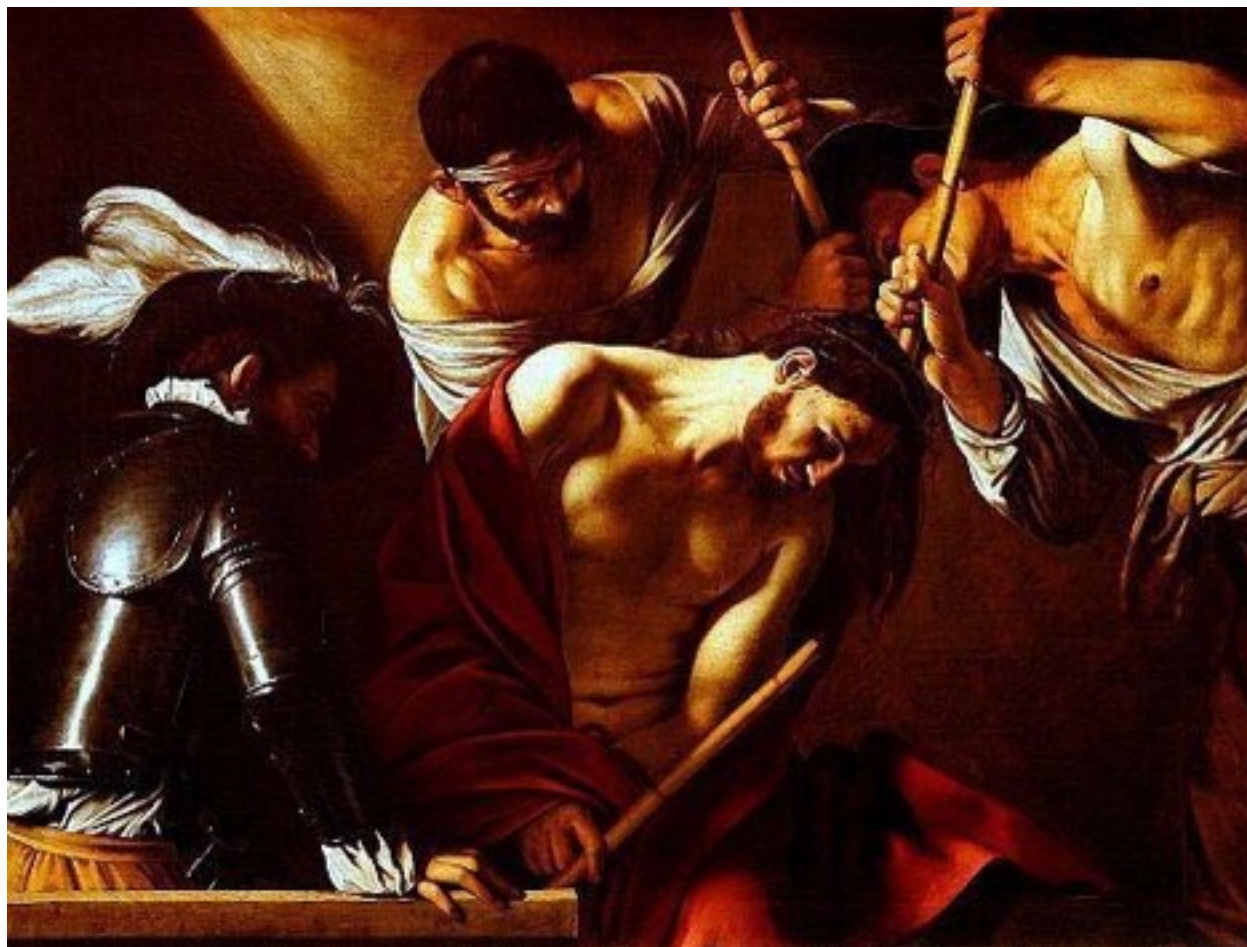


Turning the Other Cheek



“But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one to him as well.”

Matthew 5:39

Ouch! This is a hard teaching to embrace.

Did Jesus really mean this? Often, when put in the situation where someone wrongs us or hurts us we can tend to immediately rationalize away this Gospel passage and presume it doesn't apply to us. Yes, it's a hard teaching to believe and an even harder one to live.

What does it mean to “turn the other cheek?” First, we should look at this on a literal level. Jesus did mean what He said. He is the perfect example of this. Not only was He slapped on the cheek, He was also brutally beaten and hung on a cross. And His response was, “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.” Therefore, Jesus does not call us to do anything that He Himself was not willing to do.

Turning the other cheek does not mean that we need to cover up another’s abusive actions or words. We ought not pretend that they have done nothing wrong. Jesus Himself, in forgiving and in asking the Father to forgive, acknowledged the grave injustice He received at the hands of sinners. But the key is that He did not allow Himself to be drawn into their malice.

Often times, when we feel like another flings mud at us, so to speak, we are tempted to fling it right back. We are tempted to fight and push the bully back. But the key to overcoming the malice and cruelty of another is to refuse to be drawn down into the mud. Turning the other cheek is a way of saying that we refuse to degrade ourselves to foolish bickering or arguing. We refuse to engage irrationality when we encounter it. Instead, we choose to allow another to reveal their malice to themselves and to others by peacefully accepting it and forgiving.

This is not to say that Jesus wants us to perpetually live in abusive relationships that are more than we can handle. But it does mean that we will all encounter injustice from time to time and we need to handle it with mercy and immediate forgiveness, and not become drawn into returning malice for malice.

Reflect, today, on any relationships that are difficult for you. Especially reflect upon how ready you are to forgive and to turn the other cheek. Doing this may just bring you the peace and freedom you seek in that relationship.

Lord, help me to imitate Your great mercy and forgiveness. Help me to forgive those who have hurt me and help me to rise above any injustice I encounter. Jesus, I trust in You.