

**On May 13, 1981, a young Turkish radical, Ali Agca, seriously wounded Pope John Paul 2, hitting him with 4 bullets. After a long recovery, the Pope astonished the world by visiting Agca in prison to offer him his forgiveness.**

**The Holy Father was really putting into practice the teachings of Our Lord Jesus Christ, especially as found in today’s Gospel from St. Matthew: “love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you. . . For if you love those who love you, what recompense do you have?”**

**This teaching of Our Lord, which is still challenging for us to implement, was even more challenging for his original disciples. They were used to the so-called “law of retaliation”: “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” This OT tradition was really a toning down of the much harsher practices found in many early civilizations.**

**This teaching of Our Lord challenges us as individuals and as a community of faith. Our first reaction when someone threatens or attacks us verbally or physically is to retaliate in kind. We, of course, should defend ourselves firmly against any kind of abuse without recourse to aggressive or abrasive or revengeful behavior.**

**To put into practice this radical teaching of Our Lord can be difficult if we rely solely on our own resources. The way to proceed is to plug in, to be activated, by God’s grace. As his disciples, he tells us in the 1<sup>st</sup> reading, from the OT Book of Leviticus: “be holy, for I the Lord, am holy.” In the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading, from St. Paul’s 1<sup>st</sup> letter to the Corinthians, we are reminded that we are the “temple of the God, which is holy.”**

**Becoming what we are called to be, the Lord’s holy temple, is a life-long process. It comes about only by seeking a closer relationship with God through prayer, worship, and reception of the sacraments. It bears fruit in our trying to discipline ourselves to be more tolerant and loving and forgiving toward others, especially those who irritate and hurt us, and to hope for the same tolerance and forgiveness from others whom we irritate and hurt.**

**As we all too well know, anger, hatred, betrayal, and violence abound in our society today. We also know that the antidote is not to respond in kind. To do so only adds more anger, hatred, betrayal, and violence to all concerned. There is an old saying which has some practical validity: “kill your enemies with kindness.”**

**We all desire a peaceful life and world. Besides the example of Saint John Paul 2<sup>n</sup>, we have the non-violent witness of people like Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and more recently, in 2006, the Amish families who quickly forgave the killer of 5 young girls in Lancaster County. May we strive, with the help of God’s grace, to imitate these heroes as they imitate the teaching and example of Our Lord Jesus Christ.**