A cartoon appeared on the AgnusDei.org web site this week. Since the Latin phrase Agnus Dei refers to the theological concept, Lamb of God, the two speakers are each sheep.

Sheep Number One says, Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Sheep Number Two says, Yes.

Sheep Number One: It seems so straightforward.

Sheep Number Two says: Yes

Then Sheep Number One says: Until I get into the details. To which sheep number two replies: The devil is **IN** the details.

And so it goes. In the Gospel passage today, Jesus’s instructions about how we are to relate to God and others in the world seem pretty straightforward. That is, until we actually try to do them. And then we realize that sometimes our human nature just doesn’t quite cooperate.

Living as Christ taught us sometimes is pretty hard. We find it reasonably easy to be nice to those who are nice to us, but we can’t always bring ourselves to be kind to those who treat us badly. We often secretly or even not so secretly wish that God would rain down bad things on our enemies. And even though we know that we are supposed to focus on our reward in heaven, when it really comes down to it we still spend a lot of time thinking about earthly comforts and popularity and feeling good about ourselves. Even though we know we are supposed to please God, we sometimes just occasionally want to please those we have to live with on earth even if that means not pleasing God.

Only someone like St Francis of Assisi or Mother Theresa or St John or St Andrew can really hope to ever meet this lofty criteria that Jesus has given us in these words from the Gospel passage, right?

Hmm.

Many of us are familiar with these instructions -- blessed are you who are hungry; blessed are you who weep --from a similar discourse found in the book of Matthew, which we often call the Beatitudes. If we had read just a few verses before the passage we’re given in Luke, however, we’d find a very major difference between Matthew’s version of the events and Luke’s. In Matthew, Jesus goes up on the holy mountain (a place of prayer) and speaks to his disciples around him and down to the others below. In Luke, Jesus has been on the holy mountain but comes down onto the plain -- amid all the regular everyday people – the folks like you and me – and utters these words. So Jesus means them for us. He’s setting that bar high for us – not just for those holy people. We will fail, but we’ll keep trying. When I look at all these woes that come for not measuring up, I thank God we have Jesus. Because having Jesus is what really makes us a saint.

The word we translate as saint comes from a Greek word – hagios (ha GE os) - that means sacred, pure and blameless. That sounds like Mother Theresa and St. Francis for sure – but it also is us. Because as we look more closely at the derivation and usage of hagios, we see that it is made up of portions of two Greek words – hagnos, which is innocent, and chag, (kag) which is sacrifice.

We have been made saints and all those people on our remembrance list have been made saints because of the sacrifice of the innocent one, Jesus, for us. We are made holy through our encounter with a loving Lord. Anyone who has had that encounter – whether one of those capital “S” saints that we think of as on the mountaintop or whether one of us little “s” people down on the plains – is holy. We are saints because we belong to Christ. Christ has come to dwell in us. The more of ourselves we allow Christ to control, the more we’re able to live into this lifestyle Jesus calls us to – way down here on the plain. That process of allowing Christ to control more and more of us is known as sanctification, which is a big, churchy word that means that Jesus living in us helps make us more like Him.

And if we mess up, through the grace of Jesus, we are forgiven and we receive an opportunity to try again. We don’t have to fear that devil who is in the details because we know that Jesus has beaten that devil on our behalf.

Living into our faith sometimes is hard. Not one of us is perfect. But absolutely all of us are loved by God so much and have been made perfect through the loving arms of Christ who were spread out in death for us and who encircle us in love.

All of us are saints. We’re not perfect. We ARE open to grace.

Amen