

Scripture Study

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle A



Opening prayer

Sirach 15:15-20

(Ps 119:1-2,4-5,17-18,33-34)

1 Corinthians 2:6-10

Matthew 5:17-37

Overview of the Gospel:

- Continuing on with the Sermon on the Mount we have been hearing from the last two weeks, Jesus now briefly touches on a series of teachings on Christian living and his perfection of Old Covenant moral laws. These include (in this weeks Gospel) teachings on the Law and the Prophets (verses 17-20), dealing with anger (21-26), adultery (27-30), divorce (31-32), and the making of oaths (33-37).
- In a section sometimes called “the Six Antitheses” (verses 21-28), Jesus acts with authority in perfecting and deepening the Mosaic Law. Each antithesis follows a similar format: Jesus cites the Old Law, saying “*you have heard it was said...*”, and responds with the refrain “*...But I say to you*”. Jesus is thus established as the new Moses and the lawgiver of the New Covenant.
- The kingdom of heaven (Mt 4:17) established by Jesus extends the boundaries of old Covenant Israel in two ways: (1) Outwardly, it extends the boundaries of physical, Old Testament Israel to an international kingdom in the Church, and (2) Inwardly, the kingdom now goes beyond just right conduct, but penetrates to the heart and creates saints.

Questions:

- In the 1st Reading, we can see that God expected even the people of the Old Testament to do their utmost to keep the moral law. Along with a higher standard, what does Jesus also give us to enable us obey his commandments (Romans 6:9-14)?
- In the 2nd Reading, in verse 9, St. Paul pulls verses from Isaiah 64:4 and Sirach 1:10 to express his wonderment at the mystery of God’s plan for the world. What is this plan? (see Ephesians 2)
- In the Gospel, what attitude do you think Jesus wants you to take regarding the observance of his law (Mt 5:17-20)? How can your righteousness exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees?
- How much do you struggle with anger and unforgiveness (verses 21-26)? How does this affect the quality of the service and worship you offer to God? How can you offer a more pure worship to God?
- If you are married, how well does your marriage mirror Jesus’ high standard for the state of holy matrimony (verses 27-32)? How can you sharpen that image? If you are not married, how can you help and encourage those near you who are married to have holier, more godly, marriages?
- Oaths and vows are an important part of any civil society. In your private life, however, do you feel it necessary to bolster your word with a private oath? What is the standard of personal integrity that Jesus wants his disciples to have (verses 33-37)? How can you maintain that standard?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 1967, 577, 578, 581, 678, 764, 1034, 1424, 2053—54, 2153

Closing Prayer

Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings!

On the question of relating to our fellowman - our neighbor's spiritual need transcends every commandment. Everything else we do is a means to an end. But love is an end already, since God is love. -St. Edith Stein

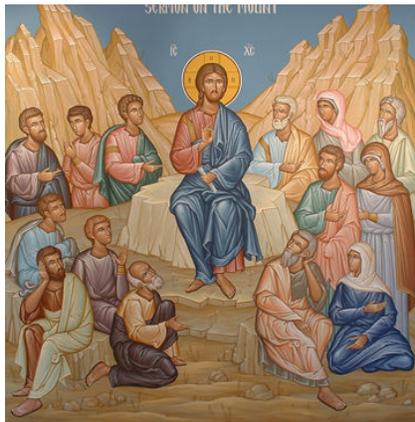
"He who does the commandments and teaches them shall be called great"

Scripture: *Matthew 5:17-37*

Meditation: Why do people tend to view the "law of God" negatively rather than positively? Jesus' attitude towards the law of God can be summed up in the great prayer of Psalm 119: "Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day." For the people of Israel the "law" could refer to the Ten Commandments or to the five Books of Moses, called the Pentateuch, which explain the commandments and ordinances of God for his people. The "law" also referred to the whole teaching or way of life which God gave to his people. The Jews in Jesus' time also used it as a description of the oral or scribal law.

Jesus taught reverence for God's law – reverence for God himself, for the Lord's Day, reverence or respect for parents, respect for life, for property, for another person's good name, respect for oneself and for one's neighbor lest wrong or hurtful desires master us. Reverence and respect for God's commandments teach us the way of love – love of God and love of neighbor. What is impossible to men is possible to God and those who have faith in God. God gives us the grace to love as he loves, to forgive as he forgives, to think as he thinks, and to act as he acts. The Lord loves righteousness and hates wickedness. As his followers we must love his commandments and hate every form of sin. Do you love the commands of the Lord?

Are you ever driven by anger, rage, or revenge? Sin doesn't just happen to us; it first grows as a tiny seed in our heart. Unless it is uprooted, by God's grace, it grows like a weed and chokes the vine and all its fruit. Jesus addressed the issue of keeping the commandments with his disciples. The scribes and Pharisees equated righteousness with satisfying the outward observance of the law. Jesus showed them how short they had come. Jesus points to the heart as the



seat of desire and choice. Unless evil and forbidden desires are eradicated, the heart will be corrupted. Jesus points to forbidden anger with one's brother. This is a selfish anger that broods and is long-lived, that nurses a grudge and keeps wrath warm, and that refuses to die. Harboring anger in the heart as well as anger in speech and action are equally forbidden by God. Do you harbor any anger towards another person? And are you quick to be reconciled when a rupture has been caused in your relationships? Ask God to set you free and to fill your heart and mind with his love and goodness. Paul the Apostle reminds us that "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Romans 5:5). Through the grace and help of the Holy Spirit we can overcome malice with good, hatred with kindness, and injury with pardon.

What does Jesus mean when he says "pluck out your eye" or "cut off your hand and throw it away" if it leads you to sin? Is he exaggerating here? Jesus used forceful language to urge his disciples to choose for life – an enduring life of joy and happiness with God – rather than for death – an unending death and total separation from a community of love, peace, joy and friendship with God. Jesus set before his disciples the one goal in life that is worth any sacrifice and that goal is the conformity of our will with God and what he desires for our well-being and happiness with him. Just as a doctor might remove some part of

the body, such as a diseased limb, in order to preserve the life of the whole body, so we must be ready to part with anything that causes us to sin and which inevitably leads to spiritual death.

Jesus warns us of the terrible responsibility that we must set no stumbling block in the way of another, that is, not give offense or bad example that might lead another to sin. The young in faith are especially vulnerable to the bad example of those who should be passing on the faith. Jesus teaches that righteousness involves responding to every situation in life in a way that fulfills God's law, not just externally but internally as well. Jesus says that evil desires spring from the heart. That is why the sin of adultery must first be dealt with in the heart, the place not only of the emotions, but the mind, will, thought, and intentions as well. Jesus sets the high ideal of the married state before those who are willing to accept his commands. Jesus gives the grace and power of his Holy Spirit to those who seek to follow his way of holiness in their state of life – whether married or single. If we want to live righteously as God desires for us, then we must know and understand the intention of God's commands for us, and decide in our heart to obey the Lord. Through the gift and working of the Holy Spirit, the Lord writes his law on our hearts and gives us his power to live his way of righteousness and holiness. Do you trust in God's love and allow his Holy Spirit to fill you with a thirst for holiness and righteousness in every area of your life?

"Lord Jesus, grant this day, to direct and sanctify, to rule and govern our hearts and bodies, so that all our thoughts, words and deeds may be according to your Father's law and thus may we be saved and protected through your mighty help."

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