

6<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, FEB 12, 2017

**1st Reading:** Sirach 15:15-20 [Before you are life and death, good and evil, whichever you choose shall be given]

**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalm 119 ["Blessed are they who follow the law of the Lord"]

**2nd Reading:** 1 Corinthians 2:6-10 [eye has not seen, ear has not heard what God has prepared for those who love]

**Gospel:** Matthew 5: 20-24, 27-28, 33-34a, 37 [Unless your holiness surpasses that of the Scribes & Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of God]

On the mountain, Jesus gathered his disciples around him and he taught them, saying:  
Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill them... "I tell you, unless your holiness surpasses that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of God.

"You have heard the commandment imposed on your ancestors,  
'You shall not commit murder; every murderer will be liable to judgment.'

But I say to you, whoever is angry with their brother or sister, will be liable to judgment; and if you use abusive language against your sister or brother you will be answerable to the Sanhedrin, and if you hold them in contempt you risk the fires of Gehenna.

If you bring your gift to the altar and there recall that your brother or sister has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your sister or brother, and then come and offer your gift.

You have heard the commandment, 'you shall not commit adultery.'  
But I say to you, when you look at another with lust,  
you have already committed adultery in your thoughts.

"You have heard the commandment imposed on your ancestors,  
'Do not take a false oath; rather, make good to the Lord all your pledges.' What I tell you is this: do not swear at all. Say 'Yes' when you mean 'Yes' and 'No' when you mean 'No'. Anything beyond that is from the evil one."



♪ Eye has not seen, ear has not heard  
what God has ready for those who love (him);  
Spirit of love, come give us the mind of Jesus,  
teach us the wisdom of God. ♪

The words we just sang are based on the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading for today. In order to understand the other 2 readings, we need to learn the wisdom of God, or, as Paul writes in another letter, we need to receive the mind of Jesus.

There is another hymn that expresses what this wisdom is all about -

♪♪ In Christ there is no east or west, In him no south or north.  
But one great family bound by love Throughout the whole wide earth. ♪♪

If I see through the eyes of Christ, I know that the love of God includes all human beings, and even the earth, the sun, the stars & all that God has created.

This truth is seldom disputed in theory, especially by those who call themselves disciples of Christ, as we do. However, it is a truth that has not been lived by people, and nations down through the ages - and even today. Our world tends to see things in either/or terms, and to set people against each other. The results have been war, oppression and the destruction of the earth.

The wisdom of God and the mind of Christ see life in both/and terms. The consequences of this is that in Christ there is no Democrat or Republican, no immigrant or citizen, no rich or poor, no "us" and "them."

In the first reading from Sirach we hear about freedom to choose and responsibility to choose wisely. In a similar passage from Deuteronomy Moses says, "Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying the Lord and holding fast to your God."

Here it is not freedom OR responsibility, it is freedom AND responsibility. When I pray the Psalms, I find that love and truth are always connected. In life, love without truth can be weak and without a backbone, but truth without love can be rigid and even cruel.

The New Testament says clearly that God is love, but it also says that God is truth. This means that to choose life is to make choices out of love but also to seek to discern the consequences of your choice in truth. It's not either/or it's both/and.

But that is not at all easy. We are so programmed to think in either/or ways that it calls for a revolution of grace to grow into having the mind of Christ. It requires tolerance for ambiguity, the work of discernment and an attitude of sacrificial love that can give us the power even to love our enemies.

There is a story that is not in the Bible but reflects the teaching of the prophets and anticipates the teaching of Jesus. I heard it at a Passover Seder I attended years ago. The usual attitude in the re-telling of the Jews escaping from slavery in Egypt is to side with the Israelites and see the Egyptians as enemies.

In this *midrash*, this rabbinic reflection on the Passover from the Mishnah, the angels are rejoicing as the Egyptians are being drowned in the Red Sea, but God is weeping. One of the angels comes to God and asks, "Why are you weeping?" And God answers simply, "The Egyptians are my children too."

In today's Gospel we can get bogged down in the details if we look at it in either/or terms. If we ask the question, "Are we called to follow the law or to violate it?" We miss the teaching of Jesus that he has come to fulfill the law, not to abolish or weaken it.

**It's really about a whole new way of looking at law..**Jesus is speaking in **both/and** language. Jesus teaches something new - but he builds on the things he learned as a child. Several times in the Gospel today we hear him say, "You have heard the commandment... but I say to you!"

Jesus does not say we have choose between these commandments & his teaching, he goes deeper - even deeper than the way of life he learned from his parents and his religion. His new law is less about specific actions and rules, and more about relationships with God and each other.

When he says, "If you bring your gift to the altar and find that you have wronged your brother or sister, go first and be reconciled, then come to worship," he is not asking us to choose between worship and relationship, he is saying that temple or church ritual is empty if we are not working to be in relationships of love and truth with each other.

When he talks about anger, he is not telling us we always have to feel good, and can never feel angry, he is saying that we can kill one another in our minds and that it is poison both for ourselves and the one we call a fool or verbally abuse. This is particularly relevant to today's use of social media. And the effects of abusive tweets or texts go beyond our minds. We know that cyber bullying has driven people to suicide.

His words about lust are not a condemnation of sexuality, but a challenge to the attitude that makes an object, a thing, out of a woman or a man. He names & challenges sexual irresponsibility, even in our minds. The laws against sexual assault are not enough, treating one another with respect and love begins in the mind.

We told a story on Christmas Eve that is a child-like & powerful parable (a children's story- for adults also) about living **both/and** rather than **either/or** lives.

As the story begins, a truth falls from the sky, but only part of it reaches the earth. This broken piece of the truth was discovered by a group of people who try to possess it make it their own because it makes them feel good. What they saw carved on the piece that reached the ground was this: "**You are loved.**" Even **Crow** and the other animals know that though it is attractive & captivating there is something missing from this truth, but the people want to keep it only for themselves and they begin to fight with those who are not part of their tribe or group so they can totally possess this broken truth.

The story goes on to say that a child, a little girl, goes to **Old Turtle**, a wisdom figure evoking the Native American image of the earth itself, to find out why people are fighting to exclude one another from this truth. **Old Turtle** gives her the other part of the stone that fell from the sky. Eventually she joins this missing piece of the truth to the broken piece/the incomplete truth that people were fighting to possess. They fit together perfectly and become the whole truth. The completed reconnected truth says this,

**"You are loved/and so are they!"**

It is a both/and statement. It reflects the wisdom of God and the mind of Christ. If we could begin to let our minds and hearts be transformed by that truth and to live it, we could find ways to welcome immigrants, AND to protect our borders from danger, we could develop technologies that respected the water, air and earth AND provide jobs for the unemployed, we could provide a living wage & education for all who were willing to work for it, AND grow our economy.

This may seem impossible, but with God all things are possible. It is possible if we begin to receive the wisdom that Paul writes about, to think with the mind of Christ, to love with the heart of Jesus. It requires us to challenge the "either/or" thinking that is so much a part of our world and even the Church and to be converted to think and feel from a "both/and" place before we use the tools of either/or thinking. This kind of conversion overflows our capacity and can only be received from God. The truth that "we are loved, and so are they", is what we celebrate at Mass every weekend. This is the inclusive love we are sent to share.

Are you and I ready to live that love and truth? If we do, the law will be fulfilled in us because the Spirit will show us what to choose and empower us to do it. As one of the new [Catholic] dismissal prayers says, we will be sent on mission to "Go in peace to glorify the Lord with your life!"

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