

6th Sunday of Ordinary Time – A Cycle - 02122017

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time Lectionary: 76

Reading 1 [Sir 15:15-20](#)

If you choose you can keep the commandments,
they will save you;
if you trust in God, you too shall live;
he has set before you fire and water
to whichever you choose, stretch forth your hand.
Before man are life and death, good and evil,
whichever he chooses shall be given him.
Immense is the wisdom of the Lord;
he is mighty in power, and all-seeing.
The eyes of God are on those who fear him;
he understands man's every deed.
No one does he command to act unjustly,
to none does he give license to sin.

Responsorial Psalm [Ps 119:1-2, 4-5, 17-18, 33-34](#)

R. (1b) **Blessed are they who follow the law of the Lord!**

Blessed are they whose way is blameless,
who walk in the law of the LORD.
Blessed are they who observe his decrees,
who seek him with all their heart.

R. **Blessed are they who follow the law of the Lord!**

You have commanded that your precepts
be diligently kept.

Oh, that I might be firm in the ways
of keeping your statutes!

R. **Blessed are they who follow the law of the Lord!**

Be good to your servant, that I may live
and keep your words.

Open my eyes, that I may consider
the wonders of your law.

R. **Blessed are they who follow the law of the Lord!**

Instruct me, O LORD, in the way of your statutes,
that I may exactly observe them.

Give me discernment, that I may observe your law
and keep it with all my heart.

R. **Blessed are they who follow the law of the Lord!**

Reading 2 [1 Cor 2:6-10](#)

Brothers and sisters:

We speak a wisdom to those who are mature,
not a wisdom of this age,
nor of the rulers of this age who are passing away.
Rather, we speak God's wisdom, mysterious,
hidden,
which God predetermined before the ages for our
glory,
and which none of the rulers of this age knew;
for, if they had known it,
they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.
But as it is written:
*What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard,
and what has not entered the human heart,
what God has prepared for those who love him,*
this God has revealed to us through the Spirit.

For the Spirit scrutinizes everything, even the
depths of God.

Alleluia [cF. mt 11:25](#)

R. **Alleluia, alleluia.**

Blessed are you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth;
you have revealed to little ones the mysteries of the
kingdom.

R. **Alleluia, alleluia.**

Gospel [Mt 5:17-37](#)

Jesus said to his disciples:

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or
the prophets.

I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.

Amen, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass
away,

not the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter
will pass from the law,
until all things have taken place.

Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these
commandments

and teaches others to do so

will be called least in the kingdom of heaven.

But whoever obeys and teaches these
commandments

will be called greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses

that of the scribes and Pharisees,

you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

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"You have heard that it was said to your ancestors,
You shall not kill; and whoever kills will be liable to judgment.

But I say to you,
whoever is angry with his brother
will be liable to judgment;
and whoever says to his brother, 'Raqa,'
will be answerable to the Sanhedrin;
and whoever says, 'You fool,'
will be liable to fiery Gehenna.
Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar,
and there recall that your brother
has anything against you,
leave your gift there at the altar,
go first and be reconciled with your brother,
and then come and offer your gift.
Settle with your opponent quickly while on the way
to court.

Otherwise your opponent will hand you over to the
judge,
and the judge will hand you over to the guard,
and you will be thrown into prison.
Amen, I say to you,
you will not be released until you have paid the last
penny.

"You have heard that it was said,
You shall not commit adultery.
But I say to you,
everyone who looks at a woman with lust
has already committed adultery with her in his
heart.
If your right eye causes you to sin,
tear it out and throw it away.
It is better for you to lose one of your members
than to have your whole body thrown into Gehenna.
And if your right hand causes you to sin,
cut it off and throw it away.
It is better for you to lose one of your members
than to have your whole body go into Gehenna.

"It was also said,
Whoever divorces his wife must give her a bill of divorce.
But I say to you,
whoever divorces his wife - unless the marriage is
unlawful -
causes her to commit adultery,

and whoever marries a divorced woman commits
adultery.

"Again you have heard that it was said to your
ancestors,
*Do not take a false oath,
but make good to the Lord all that you vow.*
But I say to you, do not swear at all;
not by heaven, for it is God's throne;
nor by the earth, for it is his footstool;
nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.
Do not swear by your head,
for you cannot make a single hair white or black.
Let your 'Yes' mean 'Yes,' and your 'No' mean 'No.'
Anything more is from the evil one."

or [MT 5:20-22a, 27-28, 33-34a, 37](#)

Jesus said to his disciples:
"I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses
that of the scribes and Pharisees,
you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

"You have heard that it was said to your ancestors,
You shall not kill; and whoever kills will be liable to judgment.
But I say to you,
whoever is angry with his brother
will be liable to judgment.

"You have heard that it was said,
You shall not commit adultery.
But I say to you,
everyone who looks at a woman with lust
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"Again you have heard that it was said to your
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*Do not take a false oath,
but make good to the Lord all that you vow.*
But I say to you, do not swear at all.
Let your 'Yes' mean 'Yes,' and your 'No' mean 'No.'
Anything more is from the evil one."

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6th Sunday in Ordinary Time-A

In the Gospel for this Weekend's Mass we are well into the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), and today we cover a good deal of Chapter 5. In a way the Lord is drawing a picture for us of the transformed human person. He is presenting a kind of slide show of what sanctity really is. In understanding this rather lengthy text we do well to reflect on it in three parts: **the Power, the Principle, and the Picture of new life in Christ.**

I. The **Power** of New Life in Christ – We have discussed before that an important principle of the Christian moral vision is to understand that it is essentially received, not achieved. Holiness is a work of God. The human being acting out of the power of his flesh alone cannot keep, and surely not fulfill, the Law. The experience of God's people in the Old Testament bears this out. True holiness (and not mere ethical rule keeping) is possible only by and through God's grace.

In this sense we must understand the moral vision given by Jesus as a description rather than a mere

prescription. Notice what the text says here: *I have come not to abolish but to fulfill [the Law]*. It is Jesus who fulfills the Law. And we, who are more and more in him, and He in us brings about the fulfillment of the Law. It is His work.

This is a work of God, the power is in the Blood and the cross. The power comes to us by grace. It is all a work of God.

Hence, Jesus, in today's Gospel is **not** giving us a rigorous set of rules to follow (and they are rigorous) but, is describing what the transformed human person is like. Clearly his description is not some merely impossible ideal, but is set forth as the normal Christian life. The normal Christian is a transformed human person. The normal Christian, to use Jesus' description from today's Gospel, has authority over his anger and sexuality, loves his wife and family and is a man of his word. All this comes to him as the fruit of God's grace.

It is very important to understand that this is a life offered to us by God. Otherwise we are simply left with moralism here: "Stop being so

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angry and unchaste, stop getting divorced, and stop lying.” Rather, what is offered here is new life in Christ where, on account of an inner transformation by the power of grace, we see anger abate, unchastity diminish, the love of others increase, and we speak the truth in love. So the power to do this is not from our flesh, but from the Lord, through the power of his cross to put sin to death and bring forth new life in us.

II. The **Principle** of New Life in Christ – The key word in Jesus’ moral vision is that, by his grace we do not merely keep the Law, but **fulfill** it. The key word is “fulfill” and to fulfill means to fill something full, to meet more than what is minimally required and to enter into the full vision and meaning of the Law.

Thus, to use Jesus’ examples in today’s Gospel:

- It is not enough to refrain from killing, true life in God means that vengeful hatred is removed from me and I love even my enemy and am reconciled with people I have wrongfully hurt or offended.
- It is not enough merely to avoid adultery, true life in Christ means that I am chaste and pure even in my thoughts, that by God’s grace I have authority over what I am thinking and shun unchaste thoughts.
- It is not enough to merely follow proper divorce law. True life in Christ means I don’t even want to divorce my wife. I actually love her, and my children. I am reconciled to her and accepting that she is not perfect and neither am I.
- It is not enough to simply refrain from swearing false oaths. True life in Christ means speaking the truth in love, being a man of my words. The grace of God keeps me from being duplicitous and deceitful.

In all these ways the law is not merely kept, it is *fulfilled*. It is filled full in that all these implications are abundantly and joyfully lived as Jesus Christ transforms me. Christ came to fulfill the Law and in Christ, as our union with him grows more perfect we also fulfill the

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Law. For what Christ does we do, for we are in him and he is in us. As he says, *I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.* (John 15:5)

III. The **Picture** of New Life in Christ. – The Lord then goes on to show us six pictures of what a transformed human being looks like. In the Gospel for today's Mass we look at only four. These pictures are often called "antitheses" since they are all formulated as: *You have heard that it was said.....but I say to you.* But the key point is to see them as pictures of what happens to a person in whom Jesus Christ is really living. Let's look at each.

A. On the subject of Anger –

The text begins: *You have heard that it was said to your ancestors, You shall not kill; and whoever kills will be liable to judgment. But I say to you, whoever is angry with brother will be liable to judgment; and whoever says to brother, 'Raqa,' will be answerable to the Sanhedrin; and whoever says, 'You fool,' will be liable to fiery Gehenna.* Thus the Lord teaches us

that the commandment not to kill has a deeper meaning that must be filled full. What leads to murder? Is it not the furnace of anger, retribution, and hatred within us? We may all experience a flash of anger and it passes. Further there is such a thing as righteous anger which is caused by the perception of injustice and sin. The Lord himself exhibited this sort of anger a lot. These sorts of anger are not condemned. Rather the anger that is condemned is the anger that is born on hate and a desire for revenge, an anger that goes so far as to wish the other were dead and to deny that they possess any real human dignity. This is what leads to murder.

That the Lord has this sort of anger in mind is revealed in the examples he uses of the expression of this anger: *Raqa* and *fool*. These words express contempt and hatred. *Raqa* is untranslatable, but seems to have had the same impact as the "N-word" today. It is a very hurtful word expressing deep contempt. Now this has to go. It cannot remain in a person in whom the Lord authentically lives. And it *will* go, to the degree that we allow Christ to live in us. If that

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be the case then increasingly we cannot hate others, for the Lord is in us and he died for all out of love. How can I hate someone he loves?

The Lord makes it clear that if this doesn't go, we are going to jail: *Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Settle with your opponent quickly while on the way to court. Otherwise your opponent will hand you over to the judge, and the judge will hand you over to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Amen, I say to you, you will not be released until you have paid the last penny.* Thus, either we allow the Lord to effect this reconciliation in us or we're off to jail. Whether the jail is hell or purgatory (for it would seem there is release from this jail after the last penny is paid), jail it is. We are not going to heaven until and unless this matter is resolved. Why delay the issue? Let the Lord work it now. Don't go to jail because of your grudges and stubborn refusal to admit your own offenses.

B. On the subject of Lust – *The text begins:* *You have heard that it was said, You shall not commit adultery. But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.* – Thus the Lord teaches us that the commandment against adultery has a deeper meaning beyond merely transgressing marriage bounds. To fill this Law full means to be chaste in all matters and in mind and heart.

It is wrong to engage in any illicit sexual union, but if one is looking at pornography, and fanticing about others, sexually, beyond the bounds of marriage, one is already in adultery. What the Lord is offering us here is a clean mind and pure heart. He is offering us authority over our sexuality and thoughts. To some in the world, such a promise seems impossible. But God is able to do it and increasingly so for those who are in Christ, self-mastery increases and purity of mind and heart become a greater reality. Our flesh alone cannot do this, but thanks be to God who gives us the victory in Christ. It is his work in us to give us these gifts.

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The text goes on to say: *If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have your whole body thrown into Gehenna. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have your whole body go into Gehenna.* Therefore we have to be serious about these matters. The Lord is using hyperbole, but he is using it to make a firm point. It is to say that it is more serious to sin in this matter than to lose your eyesight, or limbs from your body.

Now, most moderns don't think this way. They make light of sin, and sexual sin, in particular. But God does not make light of it. Jesus here teaches that it is worse to lose our soul than to lose parts of our body. If we were losing our eyesight or a limb to cancer we would probably be begging the Lord to deliver us. But why do we not think of sin in this way? Why are we not horrified by sexual sin in the same degree? We are clearly skewed in our thinking. Jesus is clear that these sorts of sins can land us in hell (which is here called

Gehenna). Lustful thinking, pornography, masturbation, fornication, adultery, contraception and homosexual acts have to go. They are not part of life in Christ who wants to give us freedom and authority over our sexual passions.

Let's be clear, a lot of people today are in some pretty serious bondage when it comes to sexuality. Jesus stands before us all and says, "Come let me live in you and give you the gift of sexual purity. It will be my gift to you, it will be my work in you to set you free from all disordered passion."

C. On the subject of Divorce –
The text says: *It was also said, Whoever divorces his wife must give her a bill of divorce. But I say to you, whoever divorces his wife – unless the marriage is unlawful – causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery –* At the time of the Lord Jesus, divorce was permitted in Israel, but a man had to follow the rules. But the Lord says to fulfill marriage law is to love your wife, love your husband. He teaches that when He begins to live his life in us, love for our spouse will grow, love for our

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children will deepen. The thought of divorce won't even occur! Who wants to divorce someone they love?

If the Lord can help us to love our enemy he can surely cause us to love our spouse. It is a true fact that some of the deepest hurts can occur in marriage. But the Lord can heal all wounds and help us to forget the painful things of the past.

Here too the Lord is blunt. He simply refuses to recognize all those little pieces of paper people run about with saying that some human judge approved their divorce. God is not impressed with the legal document and may well still consider the person married!

Here too the Lord says, "Come to me, bring me your broken marriage, your broken heart and let me bring healing. It is a true fact that sometimes one has a spouse who simply leaves or refuses to live in peace. Here too the Lord can heal by removing the loneliness and hurt that might drive one to a second marriage where (often) there is more trouble waiting. Let the Lord bring strength, healing and restore unity.

He still works miracles, and sometimes that is what it is going to take.

D. On the subject of Oaths –
The text says: *Again you have heard that it was said to your ancestors, Do not take a false oath, but make good to the Lord all that you vow. But I say to you, do not swear at all; not by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is his footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Do not swear by your head, for you cannot make a single hair white or black. Let your 'Yes' mean 'Yes,' and your 'No' mean 'No.' Anything more is from the evil one.* The people of Jesus' time had lots of legalism associated with oaths and lots of tricky ways of watering down the truth. The Lord says, just cut it all out, and be a man or a woman of your word. When Jesus begins to live his life in us, we speak the truth in Love. When we make commitments we are faithful to them, we do not lie and we don't play games with the truth. God is truth, and as he lives in us, we too become the truth, speak the truth and live the truth. This is the gift that Jesus offers us here.

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So then, here are four pictures of a transformed human being.

Remember, the Sermon on the Mount is filled with promises more than prescriptions, descriptions more than demands. The Lord is promising us here what he can and will do for us.

Opening our hearts wide, let us all become witnesses of the transformative power of Jesus' grace and love. And I promise you my brothers and sisters, in the Lord Jesus Christ, that everything he offers us here, he will indeed do for us. It is already happening.
Amen.