

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.” Words from our Gospel today from the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew – sisters and brothers, may the Lord give to you his peace and his joy.

There are two movements, two journeys that we make in the life of faith. There is a journey outward, characterized by what we say and what we do, as well as how we come to interact with people and the world around us. For our purposes, I would like to call this the movement of religion. Religion formalizes and directs our external activity. There is also a journey inward, where we come to understand more fully who we are, and where we can hear God speaking to us in the depths of our souls. This personal, inner movement is the spiritual movement. The two movements of faith mutually inform each other. Our external actions reveal and express something of our inner selves and this is captured in our way of life, our religiosity. Simultaneously, our inner selves are shaped by what is happening outside of us as we respond to such things. Our faith life runs into a problem, however, when these spiritual and religious movements are in conflict with one another.

Let me tell you a story. A few years ago now, a young gentleman entered Christ the King Seminary whose name was Luke Uebler. He was active and liked competing in sporting events as a way of exercising and staying healthy. One day early in his seminary career, he had the bright idea to bring together fellow seminarians who shared similar interests so that they could participate in such sporting events together. He called this project OATS – Optional Athletic Training for Seminarians, and Luke proposed at the next house meeting that anyone who was interested could meet together on Tuesday Evenings to participate in some sporting activity together. Unfortunately for Luke, faculty member Fr. Greg didn’t think that meeting on Tuesday evenings was a good idea, explaining that while 1<sup>st</sup> theology students might be free on Tuesdays, many other seminarians had classes that evening or were away from campus participating in their field education assignments; perhaps another time would be better. Well, Luke in his pride decided to go ahead with OATS anyways, and as might have been predicted, there wasn’t many participants. Eventually, Luke saw the wisdom in what Fr. Greg had said. After all, having been at the seminary for a number of years, Fr. Greg had a good feel for the schedule and the rhythm of life on campus. So, the time was changed to Monday afternoons, and it happened that several students and faculty had a good time getting together each week to play some given sport together. I bet if you ask Fr. Greg, he wouldn’t remember this story, since it was just common sense advice from his years of decision-making, but for me, I really wanted to make this work on that Tuesday time slot, and so I reaped the consequences of my own shortsightedness. Why do I tell this seemingly insignificant story? I tell you this, because an inner movement of the spirit that doesn’t account for what is happening in the world around us devolves into relativism and so following our own paths, each of us becomes disconnected, and we fall apart. You could say that I was being spiritual following my heart but not religious, ignoring the wisdom of the community. Refusing to be influenced by anything outside themselves, a spiritual but not religious person conflates their own ideas with the truth and ends up making an idol out of their own thoughts.

Sometimes, the importance we place on our own individual selves prevents us from recognizing the wisdom that has passed down through hundreds and thousands of generations. In our second reading, St. Paul speaks of having a wisdom, not of this present age in and of ourselves, but a mysterious, hidden wisdom pre-determined from all time by God whose ways are greater than our own. St. Paul goes on to say that, if the rulers had known this wisdom instead of being stuck-in-themselves, they would have recognized the Christ, and would not have crucified their Lord. But we still do the same thing to Jesus today. Statistically speaking, the majority of Americans claim to be spiritual and not religious. How many times do we catch ourselves criticizing the teachings of Christ which have been passed along through the Church by our fellow human beings who themselves endeavored to live out the faith? How many people today refuse to follow in the footsteps of a suffering Messiah, or how many question the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist or how many ignore the teachings of Christ entrusted to a hierarchical teaching authority especially on something like abortion or contraceptives because they don't like it. There is wisdom here which is being ignored. In the confusion that follows, spirituality without religion dies off. It's interesting that the children of spiritual and not religious folks see themselves as neither spiritual nor religious. Spirituality needs religion. Jesus is not abolishing the law and not the smallest part of it will pass away. Indeed, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven unless your righteousness is greater than the scribes and Pharisees, those supremely religious people who followed the teachings of religion perfectly. Our first reading tells us the purpose of the external law is to bring about life and goodness in our lives and the lives of the saints proves our Church's success in that. We might think ourselves good people, but look at the extraordinary demands Jesus places on us today and discover that our spirituality has a long way to go. Spirituality needs religion.

But religion also needs spirituality. Good spirituality shows forth the vitality of religion, and yet, it's amazing how many people scrupulously live out the letter of the law and still refuse to let themselves find the intended fulfillment from doing so. We might not have killed anyone but our inner anger and resentment have left us dead inside, cut off from others. And while we may not have cheated or committed adultery, the temptations of lust leave us feeling inadequate and unloved. And when our words don't reflect who we are or what is on our hearts, how can anyone come to trust us hypocrites? On the surface we're fine, but spiritually, our interior disposition has left us inauthentic and lifeless. External actions without integrity of heart become meaningless, and these things we stop doing, using the excuses: "I'm bored," "there's nothing in it for me," or "why bother?" Religious practice fades away when there is no spirituality undergirding it. Many people leave the Catholic Church not because they don't agree with our teachings, but because they don't see life being lived out here in all its vitality. No, Jesus hasn't abolished the law, but he also came to fulfill its interior disposition.

The true disciple allows religion to transform his or her spiritual life and goes on to express the inner workings of their heart in the manner of their life. Faith is spiritual and religious. Jesus isn't abolishing the law of religion. Indeed he is fulfilling our spiritual life. Journey outward, journey inward. Where is your journey of faith taking you?

Readings: <http://uscgb.org/bible/readings/021620.cfm>

**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** [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**[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](#) **OR** [5:20-22A, 27-28, 33-34A, 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.

“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, ‘Raca,’

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**

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 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  
has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

“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.  
Let your 'Yes' mean 'Yes,' and your 'No' mean 'No.'  
Anything more is from the evil one."