

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time  
February 12, 2017

The liturgical year continues in Matthew's gospel this week. Matthew was writing to first century Jewish Christians who were struggling to understand how the new faith they had acquired in Jesus Christ could be reconciled with their old laws, traditions, and way of life. Matthew wanted to assure them that their laws were not obsolete, but to introduce a completely new way of thinking for the Jewish people. Jesus states that he did not come to abolish the laws, but to bring them to completion. It is not enough for literal interpretation or external behaviors, but to be a disciple of Christ, our lives and hearts must be rooted in love of God and our neighbor. The Pharisees wanted to keep the laws, but very often neglected the needs of others. Jesus teaches we do not keep the law through our behavior but through our basic attitudes and values, and that we cannot separate our relationship with God and our relationship with all people.

Jesus gives us four examples in this week's gospel. The first example is "Thou shalt not kill." Jesus says we must not even get angry or use insulting words with others. This is a pretty tall order in our society today. He wants to emphasize that we need to deeply respect and uphold the dignity and rights of every person. That anger is the precursor to murder. So if I am going to church to worship and remember I have offended someone, I should go and reconcile with that person first. Otherwise my prayers and offerings are of no real value. Life and worship cannot be separated.

The Jewish law "Thou shalt not commit adultery" had very serious consequences. The woman involved was often stoned to death. Jesus however, says that you can commit adultery in your thoughts. It is about our attitude. We cannot use another person like a toy, just as an object to give us pleasure. Adultery is wrong not so much because of the sexual act, but because it is an act of serious injustice to the innocent married partner and a breach of trust and fidelity.

The next example deals with the Jewish law for divorce. In Jesus' time it was relatively easy for a husband to divorce his wife for trivial reasons. She could do nothing; she had no say in the matter. It was legal, but according to Jesus it was against the dignity and rights of the wife. For Jesus, it is not enough for something to be legal it must be just, moral and an expression of love.

"Do not take a false oath, but make good to the Lord all that you vow." Today we would write up a contract between two parties and have them sign it. In Jesus' time people guaranteed the truth by making a solemn oath before God. Jesus' point is that a Christian is a reliable and totally honest person. Their "yes or "no" means exactly what they say.

We Catholics often ask "Is this or that a sin? Is it a venial sin or a mortal sin?" Is it against the law? But a true Christian does not ask if an act is legal or illegal. They love God, Jesus and humanity, and their only question is how I can love more. What more can I do.

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