

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Fr. Michael Renninger

“Have breakfast with me tomorrow.”

Her name was Nicky. I met her in 1983, when I spent my junior year of college studying at Saint Andrews in Scotland.

She was from a small town near Glasgow.

During that year, we became part of a group of friends, who spent a lot of time enjoying university life in Scotland.

At that time, I was seriously praying about the possibility of becoming a priest. So I was content to have a great group of friends. I had not gone to Scotland to start dating anyone.

Maybe that’s why I was confused in the days leading up to Saint Valentine’s Day, 1984.

That semester, I didn’t have any classes on Tuesdays, so I did what any self-respecting college student would do. Every Tuesday, I slept until lunch time!

It was glorious. And I told my friends how much I loved sleeping late. So I was confused on February 13th. I was in the hallway after class, talking with some friends. Nicky came up to me and said, “Have breakfast with me tomorrow.”

I quickly reminded her that I always slept late on Tuesday. I thanked her for her kind invitation, and suggested that we do lunch another day.

She shrugged her shoulders and said, “we’ll see.”

As she walked away, another student hit me on the shoulder and said, “You dummy! Why did you say no?” And I said, “Because I like to sleep late on Tuesdays!”

And he said, “In Scotland, there is an old custom that the first person you see and talk to on St. Valentine’s day will be the person you love!”

(We didn’t have that custom in Pennsylvania.)

So my Scottish friend said, “You’re so daft! When she said, “Have breakfast with me,” she really meant was that she likes you a lot!”

Got it? When she said, “Have breakfast,” she was really saying she wanted to be my Valentine!

Have you had that experience? People say one thing to you, but then you realize that they meant something more?

In today's Gospel, Jesus asks us not only to listen to what God *said*, but to also understand what God *meant*. The Message of God's love has been communicated to humans for many centuries. Jesus reminds us that it's not enough to *read* God's words – we have to *listen* for what God meant.

Jesus quotes a series of commandments which were spoken by God and recorded in the Old Testament. There, we read that God said: “keep holy the Sabbath. Honor your father and mother. Don't steal. Don't kill. Don't commit adultery. Don't lie.”

People wrote down what God *said*. But sometimes they misunderstood what God *meant*. We often look at every word God spoke, and we try to figure out how ‘fulfill the commandment’ while doing the least possible work. Or, if the command is a hard one, we try to figure out how to find loopholes in the wording so that our behavior doesn't have to change

For instance:

+ God said, “keep *holy the sabbath*.” So, a holy things to do on the sabbath is pray. OK. But what if I like to go to the casino on Sunday. And what if I pray a lot when I play the slot machines? (“Dear Lord, if you let me win, I'll give half my winnings to the 2nd collection!”) That's how I spend a day gambling while telling myself that I am keeping the sabbath holy. Is that what God meant?

+ God said, “do not kill.” That's what God *said*. But is the word “kill” the same as “execute,” or “abort” or did God leave us loopholes? God said don't *kill*, but he didn't say anything specific about nuclear deterrence. God said “don't *kill*,” but we're ok if we call it “assisted suicide.” Is that what God meant?

+ God said “do not commit adultery.” But when God said ‘adultery’ he clearly meant “thou shall not actually *touch* someone else.” So, if I just I stare at someone, and obsess about them, I'm still OK with God since I haven't actually touched anyone... right? Is that what God meant?

You get the idea. Jesus tells his disciples that they must listen not only to the words God *said*, but also to what God *meant*. God knows the human heart better than humans do. God knows that our external behavior flows from our internal thoughts and feelings.

God wants to change, not only our external appearances, but the interior of our hearts. Many of us have mastered the skill of appearing to be perfectly calm, while inside we are smoldering with internal rage. We get good at *pretending*. But God does not want us to pretend. God wants us to be integrated, whole and holy.

So Jesus challenges us – pay attention to what God *meant*. When God said, “Thou shall

not kill,” God indeed means that we should avoid violence toward others. And God also means that we must learn how to transform our angers into productive energy. It takes so much energy to stay angry – and anger can kill our souls and destroy our relationship.

When God says, “Don’t commit adultery,” God is not simply talking about whom you touch. God also means to challenge you about what you do with your eyes, and where you go in your thoughts, and what channel you click on your cable. You can use or abuse a human being when you are with them. You can do the same in your mind and heart – and the sin is still destructive.

When God says, “Don’t kill, don’t steal, don’t lust, don’t lie, don’t cheat, let go of your anger...” What God means is, “I love you. I love you – so let me change your heart as well as your hands, let me change your feelings as well as your behavior, let me change your attitude as well as your action.” This is the message that these children will learn as they live the life of a baptized believer. It is up to us to teach them what God said, and what God meant!

This Gospel reading is God’s gift to us this Valentine’s weekend. So wake up and listen to God’s message. These Gospel words may be hard to hear at first. But God is saying to you, “Let’s have breakfast.” And... you know what that means!

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