

Bible Study

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, cycle A

Opening Prayer: (Sign of the Cross) “Lord our God, you called us into relationship with you from the moment of conception and, when we responded, you made us your adopted sons and daughters through Baptism. May the words we read today and our reflecting on them make us better witnesses to the love you wish to shower on every person. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.”

Focusing Questions

1. Would you say that you are a rule-follower? How would you describe your attitude toward rules?
2. Which of the 10 Commandments do you find it easiest to follow?

Commentary before the First Reading: Sirach 15:15-20

The Book of Sirach is also known as the Book of Ecclesiasticus, literally the “Church Book.” It was written in approximately 200 BC by Jesus Ben (“son of”) Sirach. One of the “Wisdom Books” of the Old Testament, it is made up of proverbs that demonstrated how the Jewish teaching and traditions were a sound guide for living according to God’s will. The ones contained in these verses discuss proper use of one’s free will.

Read the First Reading aloud.

1. Is having free will a good thing or would life be easier if we just followed commands without choosing?
2. What do you think are the “fire and water” which Ben Sirach says God sets before every person?
3. Is verse 19 a threat or a positive statement? Explain.
4. If God never acts unjustly nor tells any person to act unjustly, why does God permit injustice to happen?
5. How does keeping God’s laws lead one to happiness?

Commentary before the Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 2:6-10

We continue our walk through Saint Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian Christians. This week we hear him contrasting the much-respected wisdom of the Greek philosophers, argued with impeccable logic, with the wisdom of God. In verse 6, “mature” is used to mean those who have grown into a solid faith in Jesus Christ.

Read the Second Reading aloud.

1. Find the words that Saint Paul uses in this reading to describe the wisdom of God.
2. What is the wisdom that Paul and his colleagues have preached? (cf. 1 Cor. 2:1-2)
3. In what way can that be considered “wisdom”?
4. When the Holy Spirit scrutinizes what is being taught, what is the Spirit looking for?
5. What has God prepared for those who love him?

Commentary before the Gospel Reading: Matthew 5:17-37

Saint Matthew presented many of the collected teachings of Jesus on various subjects as part of his “Sermon on the Mount.” They will continue for the rest of Chapter 5 and all of Chapter 6. The Church has set today’s 2 previous readings with these verses, because these too discuss the wisdom that can be found in keeping God’s law. By the way, Gehenna was the constantly smoldering garbage dump just outside the walls of Jerusalem.

Read the Gospel Reading aloud.

1. The Pharisees were noted for their rigorous keeping of the 613 tenets of the Jewish law. How could anyone have surpassed them in righteousness, as Jesus said his disciples should?
2. In what sense could Jesus correctly teach that “Thou shalt not kill” includes acting out of anger or insulting someone (“Raja” is the Aramaic word for “idiot”)?
3. Why not finish offering your sacrifice to God and *then* go and be reconciled with the person with whom you are at odds? What difference does the sequence make to God – or to you?
4. Similarly, what is the connection between looking lustfully at another and divorce?
5. What is wrong with a couple divorcing if their marriage is not working out satisfactorily or one of them is falling in love with someone else?
6. Looking back at those three examples, identify the pattern in Jesus’ teaching (the wisdom of God) which “completes” the law in each case?

Applying the Readings to our Daily Lives

1. Matrimony is the sacramental union of a man and a woman in a covenant with God. Please share your experience of the grace of marriage making you a better person or when God helped you (or another couple) accomplish what they never could have alone.
2. Celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation has become for many Catholics a “before-Christmas and before-Easter” sacrament. How could the Church help us to change that attitude to be more in line with what God intended?
3. Describe how you feel about going to confession and admitting the times you have violated God’s law?
4. How do you handle situations that make you very angry? What would be the “better way”?
5. Wisdom is the gift of the Holy Spirit that helps us to see situations the way God sees them. Has anyone ever told you that you are wise? Do you think you use this gift well?
6. All three of these readings present an aspect of holy wisdom. We are told that the wisdom of God is available to us in any given situation if we examine it with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In actual practice, how does one do that?

Closing Prayer (based on the song “Eye Has Not Seen” by Marty Haugen)

Spirit of God, we are told repeatedly in Holy Scriptures that no one has ever experienced what You have ready for those who love You with their whole heart, soul, mind, and strength. Give us the mind of Jesus and teach us the wisdom of God that we might more faithfully live as your disciples. Grant this through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.” (Sign of the Cross)