

February 16, 2020

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Matthew 5:17-37 or 5:20-22a, 27-28, 33-34a, 37

*(A shorter form of the gospel text may be used. It omits the text in italics.)*

Jesus said to the 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 into 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 with him. 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."

### **Background:**

Both the long and short forms of this gospel illustrate one of the ways that Jesus used a common teaching method of his day. The teacher begins by quoting a familiar teaching from the tradition and then elaborates his application. Matthew records Jesus' using this technique five times in the fifth chapter. The two that are not part of today's gospel text focus on revenge (Matthew 5:38-42) and love of one's enemies (Matthew 5:43-48).

The longer form of the gospel includes more of Jesus' explanation for his teaching. That explanation makes it clear that Jesus expects a harmony between outward observance and one's interior attitude. It is also clear that Jesus expects more than just external observance of a code. In the case of the prohibition against taking the life of another, he asks his disciples to remove those attitudes that could escalate into a situation that might lead to murder.

In a society where daily life isolates men from women and where there is very little if any privacy, adultery is rarely about a passionate romance between a man and woman. Instead it is usually motivated by one man's

attempt to bring shame upon another man and his family. If the husband does not respond, he would be considered to be weak and controlled by his wife. If he takes no action against the man involved, his own manhood is in jeopardy. The consequences that flow from this situation are dire, and therefore anything that might lead into a scenario where an act of adultery might take place is to be avoided.

The last prohibition addresses the everyday experience of bartering. In such situations, a person would make great oaths to assure the truth of their claim about the condition of the horse or fishing net or whatever might be involved. Jesus is asking his followers to be known for their honesty; that their yes means yes and their no means no, so there is no need for more to be said.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. Imagine you are able to overhear Jesus teaching his disciples “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. What kind of responses does Jesus get from the disciples?”
2. Do you recall a place in the gospel where Jesus sends a disciple away because he was not able to live up to his expectations?
3. What is your attitude toward the rules and laws of the Church?
4. Jesus seems to be asking his disciples to be disciplined not only in their actions toward others but also in their motivations from which those actions flow. Does your examination/reflection ever include both actions and motivations?
5. Have there been times when you tried to change your behavior, only to discover that you needed to change your attitude or the way that you understood yourself?
6. In Matthew 5:23 (which has been omitted from the shortened gospel text), Jesus says, “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.” Do you think Jesus meant his disciples to take this as a law, or as an invitation to imagine how their life would be different if they lived by this norm?
7. Can you take some time now to talk honestly and openly about the teachings Jesus is presenting to his disciples in this text, about your own effort to shape your behavior and your attitudes by the life and teachings of Jesus, or about some feeling or thought that arose within you from the gospel?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to [annemarie.lom@gmail.com](mailto:annemarie.lom@gmail.com)

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### **Excerpts from the readings for February 16, 2020, the Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

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.

*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.  
Oh, that I might be firm in the ways of keeping your statutes!  
Open my eyes, that I may consider the wonders of your law.  
Instruct me, O Lord, in the way of your statutes, give me discernment,  
that I may observe your law and keep it with all my heart.*

Brothers and sisters: We speak a wisdom not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age.  
Rather, we speak God's wisdom, mysterious, hidden, which God predetermined before the ages,  
and which none of the rulers of this age knew; or they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.  
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.

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. Not a letter will pass from the law until all things have taken place.  
Therefore, whoever breaks one of these commandments 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.  
Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom.  
"You have heard that it was said, 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;  
Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you,  
leave your gift there, 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, and you will be thrown into prison.  
"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.  
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 it said, 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.  
Let your 'Yes' mean 'Yes,' and your 'No' mean 'No.' Anything more is from the evil one."

**Excerpts from Sirach 15:15-20; Psalm 119:1-2, 4-5, 17-18, 33-34; 1 Corinthians 2:6-10; Matthew 5:17-37**