

February 12, 2023

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Matthew 5:17-37 [The short form of this gospel is indicated within the brackets.]

[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, ‘Raqa,’ 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 you 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 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 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

Two weeks ago, in the gospel, Jesus began to instruct his disciples. While the instructing is said to be to his disciples, there is a sense that others are also hearing Jesus’ instruction--but it is addressed to his disciples. The instruction began with Matthew’s beatitudes, Matt 5:1-12a. The teaching continued last Sunday with Jesus using very common elements of salt and light to tell the disciples that they are the salt of the earth and light of the world. Today’s gospel continues his instruction by focusing on important values of the day, and how they are stated in the law. Jesus desires that his disciples live their lives in a way that goes beyond the standards set by the scribes and Pharisees, who relay their understanding of the law.

Jesus comments on three experiences from daily life: hostility or anger toward another, respecting one another, and maintaining an honest and authentic relationship with God. In a culture where anger can easily escalate to the shedding of blood, Jesus urges his disciples to confront hostility within themselves as soon as it begins to manifest itself.

Jesus' teaching about divorce is difficult because it comes out of a culture very different than what most of us live in. In Jesus' day, wives were the property of their husbands. In this culture, the concern with adultery was more about the shame and embarrassing the husband of the woman, than the harm brought to the woman herself. We certainly live by a much greater awareness and sense of disgust at such attitudes now, but that was not the awareness of the day. Jesus' comments about divorce represent the culture of the day, and again they focus on extinguishing the desire to embarrass another from the very beginning.

Lastly, Jesus turns to how one lives one's relationship with God. He asks his disciples to be forthright. When they make a promise to God, they need to live up to that promise, to be faithful. You may recall the questions Jesus addressed to the Pharisees concerning the two sons who the father asked to go work in the field. The one said he would not go, and later regretted it and went, and the other said he would go, but did not. Jesus asked not who honored their father, but who did what the father asked.

Jesus has raised the bar on what is expected of the disciples. They are not like the scribes or the Pharisees, they are being called to a higher standard.

Reflection Questions:

1. Who are your heroes?
2. When have you been really proud of an accomplishment?
3. Has there been a time when you did just enough to get by? How did you feel about your accomplishment at that point?
4. Have you ever had a teacher, boss, or mentor who really challenged you to be the best you could be? What do you think of that person now?
5. How are you hearing Jesus' challenges in today's gospel?
6. We will begin the season of Lent in about ten days. Is there something you want to take from this gospel as you begin to think about Lent?
7. Can you take some time now to talk with Jesus about how you are hearing this gospel today? Is it coming at a good time for you?

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

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click there will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from the readings for February 12, 2023, 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 119:1-5, 17-18, 33-34; 1 Corinthians 2:6-10; Matthew 5:17-37

From Joe:

Friends,

Here are the gospel background and reflection questions for February 12th, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. The gospel is a very long one from Matthew, in five sections, as Jesus continues his Sermon on the Mount. He teaches this about commandments: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill." And ... "Whoever breaks these commandments will be

least in heaven; but whoever obeys will be called greatest in heaven." Then he goes on about four laws in specific, dealing with killing, adultery, divorce, and false oaths. Jesus also talks about the related and similarly wrong sins of acting out in anger and lust, he recommends do not swear oaths but "let your 'Yes' mean 'Yes,' and your 'No' mean 'No,'" and he says it is better to lose an eye or a hand than for the whole body to be "thrown into Gehenna."

The other readings also have references to choosing rightly, keeping the commandments, observing the laws, and the wisdom of God in all of these. In the first reading, from Sirach, it says, "Choose to keep the commandments; they will save you. The wisdom of the Lord is immense. He commands no one to act unjustly." Psalm 119 proclaims, "Blessed are those whose way is the law of the Lord. Instruct me, O Lord, give me discernment." The second reading is again from the first letter to the Corinthians, where Paul writes, "We speak God's wisdom, which God predetermined for our glory. What God has prepared for those who love him, he has revealed through the Spirit."

The message of today's readings is so clear. To no one does God give license to sin. And he sees and understands everyone's deeds. But to everyone he gives their own choice to sin or keep his commandments. And only by their choosing to keep the commandments will anyone be saved. Blessed are they who observe his decrees, who seek him with all their heart!

Joe