

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time – February 12, 2017 – Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture Reading: Sirach 15:15-20

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.

Psalm: Ps 119:1-2, 4-5, 17-18, 33-34

R. (1b) **Blessed are they who follow the law of the Lord!**

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.

You have commanded that your precepts
be diligently kept.
Oh, that I might be firm in the ways
of keeping your statutes!

Be good to your servant, that I may live
and keep your words.
Open my eyes, that I may consider
the wonders of your law.

Instruct me, O LORD, in the way of your statutes,
that I may exactly observe them.
Give me discernment, that I may observe your law
and keep it with all my heart.

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 2:6-10

Brothers and sisters: We speak a wisdom to those who are mature, not a wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age who are passing away. Rather, we speak God's wisdom, mysterious, hidden, which God predetermined before the ages for our glory, and which none of the rulers of this age knew; for, if they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written: *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.

Gospel: Matthew 5:17-37

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 brother will be liable to judgment; and whoever says to 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 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. 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."

Prayer for a New Bishop

Heavenly Father,

You have blessed our diocese time and again with good and holy bishops who have led us ever closer to you. Aware of your profound love for us, we ask you to bless us once again. Send us a good and holy man to become our next bishop. Inspire us, the clergy, religious and the laity of the diocese to work generously with him so that we might grow together in your love and continue the good work you have begun in us for the sake of all. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

It takes a while to grow up. For instance, when I was a boy and my brother was four years older (he remains such, of course), we heard a reading at Mass that included the word *raqa*. The reading told us one must not say this word to his brother, since it meant “Thou fool.” Obviously, the minute we left church we began to say, with impunity and humor, *raqa, raqa, raqa* to each other, since we were brothers in the strict sense of the word. The unusual word *raqa* is used in today’s Gospel (or at least in the “long version”). Jesus does not use it lightly. The years have helped me see that. Obviously, human beings do grow up and a progression takes place. A progression, I mean, from the uncomplicated, grinning approach to the commandments, into a place from which we can truly understand why to not call anyone fool. That progression is one way of looking at the readings for this Sunday. In the First Reading, the writer speaks in very plain terms, as a father might speak to a son or daughter. “If you choose you can keep the commandments, they will save you. If you trust in God, you too shall live.” These are ancient words, echoing one of the first books of the Jewish testament: “I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. *Choose life*, that you and your descendants may live, by loving the Lord, your God, heeding his voice, and holding fast to him” (Deut 30:19-20).

We boys would have understood. We would have recognized “life and death, good and evil.” God would show how uncomplicated it is, how un-mysterious and how far from remote for anyone to understand. Then Jesus came along. He gave nuance and fullness to these laws. Paul says that they became “a wisdom to those who are mature ... , God’s wisdom, mysterious, hidden, which God predetermined before the ages. ...” (Second Reading). So, one by one, Jesus takes various laws, in all their externality, and draws out their inner roots.

- *Do not kill*. The inner root of that law is, do not take an angry action against your brother or sister. Not even the word *raqa* may be spoken.
- *You shall not commit adultery*. The inside of that law is: be pure enough to not even look lustfully at another woman or man.
- *And, divorce*. The interior law is, stay faithful and loving within your marriage relationship, not just don’t divorce.
- *Finally, the matter of oaths*. Today people do use oaths such as “... in the name of God ... ,” or “OMG,” (which stands for O, My GOD!), or, e.g., “By God, I will never let you” You hear such slang everywhere, movies, television, high schools, grade schools, casual street-talk. Jesus diagnoses these usages simply: you are trying to make up for your weakness by implying that you are bigger than God. I have a better way, he tells them. Just say yes or no, and mean it. Be real.

Jesus offers us the Spirit, and St. Paul tells us that the Spirit “scrutinizes everything, even the depths of God”! Watch Jesus as you progress through life. The inside of the law is written in his heart. As you and I grow up, let it be written in ours too.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. “The eyes of God are on those who fear him; he understands [our] every deed.” If so, should we be frightened? Or is God the one who not only understands, but forgives and loves even sinners?
2. How is it that the Spirit can scrutinize the depths of God? Discuss ways in which the Spirit scrutinizes you.?
3. Jesus is critical of the Pharisees’ type of righteousness, which focuses on externals. They make sure everyone sees when they fast, pray on street corners, wash hands, etc. How do these things relate to the inner Spirit of the law? How do they relate to loving God and neighbor?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another’s openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

O God, who teach us that you abide in hearts that are just and true, grant that we may be so fashioned by your grace as to become a dwelling pleasing to you. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.