

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday per Annum - A  
Sirach 15:15-20;  
I Corinthians 2:6-10;  
Matthew 5:17-37  
Little Flower - 2/12/17

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today's Gospel continues the Sermon on the Mount with practical applications of what it means to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. In the beginning of today's Gospel, Jesus tells us that he has come not to abolish the law but to fulfill it. He warns us that "*unless [our] righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, [we] will not enter the kingdom of heaven.*" He then addresses three of the commandments: you shall not kill, you shall not commit adultery, and do not take a false oath. In each case, he calls us to a higher standard. Today I would like to focus on the first of these.

Jesus tells us that whoever is angry with his brother will be liable for judgment. When I was growing up, we had little examination of conscience booklets. As a child, I could never understand why anger was listed under the fifth commandment, "You shall not kill." Someone once said that Jesus was the greatest psychologist who ever lived. Today's Gospel suggests a simple connection between anger and murder: anger leads to violence, and violence leads to murder. All we have to do is read the newspaper or listen to the news to understand that this is true.

Second, Jesus tells us that whoever calls his brother names will be answerable to the Sanhedrin or liable to hell. During my first few years at St. Christopher parish, children made their first reconciliation in fourth grade. One year when I met with the class to talk about the sacrament and the commandments, I asked them if the fifth commandment, "You shall not kill," had any practical relevance to them in fourth grade. One of them very wisely said, "We can kill each other's spirits with our words."

As I mentioned in last Sunday's homily, the Internet and social media have given rise to so much vitriol not only in political matters but in every area of life. For all the good they do, they have contributed greatly to a loss of civility in our society, a coarsening of social discourse, and extreme black-and-white and all-or-nothing thinking. Because people do not have to face each other face to face, filters fail and boundaries collapse. Schools now need to have policies and programs to teach good Internet citizenship.

Finally, Jesus tells us that if we are bringing our gift to the altar and there recall that our brother has something against us, we are to leave our gift at the altar, go first and be reconciled to our brother, and then come back and offer our gift. If we are going to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, we have to become reconcilers. Please note that Jesus does not say that if we have done something to our brother, we have to seek reconciliation. In effect, he tells us that it does not matter who caused the alienation. We have to take the initiative in fixing it. As Christians, we have to be healers, peacemakers, and reconcilers.

Jesus then goes on to address the sixth and eighth commandments. If we are going to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, it is not enough that we do not commit adultery. He raises the standard and demands more respect for women. We must not look at women with lust, i.e., we must not depersonalize them. We must look at women with respect, with wonder and awe, cherishing them as persons in their otherness.

If we are going to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, we must not swear false oaths but let our "yes" mean "yes" and our "no" mean "no." I think Jesus is calling us to be more transparent in every area of our life.

My brothers and sisters, the author of Sirach reminds us that we have a choice whether or not to keep the commandments of God in their fulness as Jesus teaches them. However, our choices have eternal consequences: "*Before man are life and death, good and evil, whichever he chooses shall be given him.*" In his Letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes that he speaks "*a wisdom to those who are mature, not a wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age...*" For the most part, the Ten Commandments as they are written represent practical wisdom. Societies will not thrive, and perhaps not even survive, where killing, adultery, and untruthfulness are accepted. The wisdom of Jesus challenges us to a higher standard that is often contrary to the wisdom of the world. He challenges us to live the wisdom of God and become the-best-version-of-ourselves.