

6th Sunday per Annum - A
Sirach 15:15-20;
I Corinthians 2:6-10;
Matthew 5:17-37
Little Flower - 2/16/20

My Brothers and Sisters,

In last Sunday's Gospel, Jesus called us to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. What I never noticed until last Sunday was that Jesus defined what it means to be the light of the world: "*Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father*" [Mt. 5:16]. We are the light of the world through our good deeds.

In today's reading from Sirach, we are called to live intentional lives: "*Before man are life and death, good and evil, whichever he chooses shall be given him.*" Sirach reminds us of two truths. First, he reminds us that our choices matter. We do have the power to write our own history and to shape our destiny by the choices we make. When we make good choices, we choose life; when we make bad choices, we choose death. Second, we are responsible for our choices. God will hold us accountable for the choices we make.

Today's Gospel from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount addresses several areas of Christian life. In the first part of the Gospel, Jesus challenges us to set a good example for others by keeping the commandments. Elsewhere in the Gospels he particularly challenges us to set a good example for children. In fact, he challenges us to go above and beyond the commandments in setting a good example. Many years ago, a study found that one of the reasons people say they are unchurched is because they found that people who are churched, people like us, are often no better than they are and are sometimes worse.

Jesus then suggests what going above and beyond means. The Fifth Commandment is "You shall not kill." Jesus challenges us to not even get angry with others. When I was young, most of us had little booklets containing an examination of conscience. I never could understand why anger was listed under the fifth commandment. However, if we think about it, anger leads to violence, and violence leads to murder, something we are currently seeing all too often in our city.

In reference to the same commandment, Jesus challenges us to be healers and reconcilers: "*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.*" Note what Jesus does not say. He does not say that if we have done something wrong to our brother, we should go and be reconciled. Jesus simply says that if someone has something against us, it does not matter who started it or whose fault it is. We should take the initiative to reconcile.

Jesus also challenges us to have a profound respect for each other and for marriage. Not only are we not to commit the act of adultery, we are not to look at others with lust in our hearts. We are called to see and respect others as persons and not simply as bodies. Likewise, Jesus also challenges us to live out our marriage commitments "until death do us part."

Finally, Jesus challenges us not to swear. We should always speak truthfully and say what we mean and mean what we say.

My brothers and sisters, if allow our light to shine before others through our good deeds, if we choose life over death, if we go above and beyond to set good example for others, the life we shall receive will be beyond anything we can imagine: "*What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, [this is] what God has prepared for those who love him.*"