

6th Sunday per Annum - A
Sirach 15:15-20;
I Corinthians 2:6-10;
Matthew 5:17-37
Little Flower - 2/12/23

My Brothers and Sisters,

According to Sirach, *“Before man are life and death, good and evil, whichever he chooses shall be given him.”* God’s dream for all of us is that we become the-best-version-of-ourselves. Therefore, God will never command us to act unjustly or give us permission to sin. Choosing to do good, we choose life. Choosing to do evil, we choose death. At the same time, to enable us to become the-best-version-of-ourselves, God has blessed us with intelligence and freedom. However, with intelligence and freedom come responsibility and accountability to God. Sirach suggests that God alone knows the secrets of our hearts.

Today’s Gospel again continues Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Jesus warned his listeners, *“Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”* The examples he cited remind us that although it is necessary to keep the Ten Commandments, we have to go beyond them.

In his first example, Jesus shows his profound understanding of human nature. We must not kill, but it is also wrong to be angry with others or even to disrespect them. When I was in grade school, we had little examination of conscience booklets. As a child, I could never understand why anger was a sin against the fifth commandment. However, as adults, we know that anger leads to violence, and violence leads to murder. When we read about violence in Indianapolis, so often it is triggered by someone’s anger or by someone feeling disrespected.

Therefore, Jesus challenges us to be instruments of healing, peace, and reconciliation: *“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.”* What he does not say is as important as what he says. Jesus does not say that if we have done something wrong to someone, we should go and try to reconcile with the person. Rather he says that if someone has something against us— it does not matter whose fault it is—we are called to take the initiative in reconciling.

Jesus then challenges us in the area of sexuality. It is not only wrong to commit adultery. It is also wrong to look lustfully at a woman (which is a lot more than noticing a woman). According to Jesus, to look lustfully at a woman is to commit adultery with her in the heart. First, although Jesus is addressing this to men, it can also be addressed to women. Just as some men do not respect women, there are some women who do not respect men. Personally, I think Jesus is calling us to look at each other with respect. We are always to respect each other as persons, not objects.

Finally, Jesus quotes a variation on the eighth commandment: *“Do not take a false oath, but make good to the Lord all that you vow.”* He said we should not swear at all: *“Let your “Yes” mean “Yes,” and your “No” mean “No.””* It seems to me that Jesus is telling us that we should say what we mean and mean what we say. However, the eighth commandment extends beyond spoken or written words. When we are called to become the-best-version-of-ourselves, we are called to live authentic lives. Our actions need to be consistent with our deepest values.

My brothers and sisters, in today’s second reading, Paul speaks about God’s mysterious and hidden wisdom. Both the Old and New Testaments share God’s wisdom with us. Today’s first reading and Gospel offer us practical wisdom to help us choose life and become the-best-version-of-ourselves. If we choose life and strive to become the-best-version-of-ourselves, Paul’s vision of heaven should fill us with hope: *“... ‘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.’”*