

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2011

One of the things that strike a foreigner who comes to the USA for the first time is the importance of freedom that American people enjoy in this country: freedom of speech, freedom of association, freedom of enterprise, religious and political freedom, etc. However, as important as they might be, all these freedoms are supported by the law. In the end, it comes to just one thing, namely that there is no freedom without the law.

This is true for any free society that cannot function correctly without laws, as well as it is true for our relationship with God. The readings of this Sunday talk about the importance of human freedom that cannot exist independently of God's Law.

In the first reading, Sirach speaks of the human free will. For him, we are born to be free; but at the same time, we are accountable for any decision we make as a consequence of our freedom. That is why Sirach says that God has put before us life and death, good and evil, fire and water, so that whichever we choose will be given us. If we choose to keep the commandments or to trust God, we will certainly live and be saved. If, however, we choose the other path, it is the contrary that will happen to us.

In all the cases, no one has the right to say that God has pushed him to sin or to act unjustly. If things turn bad, it is because of human whim and stubbornness. In the same way, God's Law cannot be seen as the limitation of our freedom, but rather as a source of blessing and a help so that we assume our responsibility in the things we do.

All that leads us to today's Gospel as Jesus states that he has come not to destroy the Law, but to fulfill it. What he means by that is that he has come in order to give the Law its real meaning and raise it to another level of interpretation and comprehension. That is why he is inviting us to pay attention not only to the external aspect of the law, but also to the inner motive that is known only to ourselves and to God.

What is the essence of the law? When we look closely at the Ten Commandments, the Pentateuch and the Prophets, we can say that the real meaning of the Law is reverence and respect. Reverence for God and his name, reverence for the day of God, respect for parents, respect for life, respect for property, respect for personality, respect for the truth, etc. Reverence and respect are the foundation and the basis of the Law. As such, they will never pass away, because they are the source of our relationship with God and with one another. To try to change this essence with human regulations, as the Scribes and Pharisees have done, is to condemn ourselves to perdition.

Moreover, by stating that he has come not to abolish the law, but to fulfill it, Jesus invites us to understand that life is not a battle between the past and the present. Of course, the Law refers to the past and the present to Jesus' presence, but between them, there is continuity, because the present grows out of the past.

At times, we blame the past for many things, but we have also to recognize our debt to the past. What would our life be if people had not come before us and made the world as it is

today? That is why, instead of destroying the past, we must build upon it so that as we entered the world on the labor of some, other people may enter it on ours, too.

The examples Jesus gives about the law on murder, adultery, divorce or swearing confirm the new way of interpreting the law he has come to give. For him, in fact, in God's sight and following the inner motive, it is not only the person who has committed murder who is guilty and liable to judgment, but anyone who is angry with his fellow human being. It is not only the person who has committed adultery who is guilty, but anyone who entertains unclean thoughts about the opposite sex.

As it can be seen, Jesus offers a new perspective in the interpretation of the law that goes from outside to inside, from the external consideration of facts to the internal motive that is often hidden in the hearts of people. What Jesus says here is absolutely true, because if it might be true that we never killed a person, can we say that we never wished to strike someone? If it might be true that we never committed adultery, can we say that we never had any thought in that sense about someone?

The consequence to draw from such a vision is that it is impossible to claim our innocence before God on the simple fact that we have been respecting the Ten Commandments. The truth is that, even if we live an external life of perfection, we are not, however, spared from internal conflicts about the good and evil. That is why Jesus insists on the purity of our eyes and our hands.

In the end, it comes to just one thing: we have to be humble enough and recognize that we are sinners and need God's forgiveness in the sacrament of confession. However, we cannot make straight our relations with God if we do not make straight our relations with our brothers and sisters. That is why Jesus is right in reminding us that the reconciliation with God implies at the same time the reconciliation with our fellows.

Let us, then, strive to keep ourselves pure of heart, mind and body. Let us ask the Holy Spirit the grace of keeping our promises so that where we exercise our freedom "our Yes means Yes, and our No means No. May God's wisdom help us to make the right decisions in life, especially when we are in conflicting situations! May God bless you all!

Sirach 15, 15-20; 1 Corinthians 2, 6-10; Matthew 15, 17-37



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