

## Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2014

All the readings of this Sunday talk about the importance of the Law. They invite us to act according to God's Law and for the sake of our eternal salvation. They remind us that we are created free human beings so that we act responsibly in whatever we do.

The first reading of Sirach talks about the price of human freedom. It describes in particular the liberty relative to human freedom to keep God's commandments or not, to trust him or not. It also highlights the fact that God has put before each one of us two ways to choose from, namely good and evil, life and death. Finally, it sustains that God, in his wisdom and power, pushes nobody to act unjustly or to sin.

What is behind this text is the idea that human freedom has a price to pay for it. Another idea is the truth that a misuse or a good use of human freedom can lead to happiness or misfortune. The last idea is relative to the place of God's Law that exists, not in order to limit human freedom, but to make us responsible in assuming the consequences of our acts.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus talks about the Law. First of all, Jesus affirms that he has not come in order to abolish the Law or the prophets, but rather to fulfill them. Then, Jesus sustains that to obey the Law, to break it or to teach others to do so yields consequences. He also affirms that, though heaven and earth can pass away, the Law will never pass away. But, in order to enter the kingdom of heaven, the righteousness of those who believe in him should surpass that of the scribes and the Pharisees.

After that, the Gospel gives various instances where Jesus shows how he has come to fulfill the Law and not to abolish it. First, he recalls the prohibition to kill by saying that the fact of anger or bad words toward someone is already a liability for judgment and not only the fact of shedding someone's blood. In order to show the truth of his words, he invites people to reconciliation in case of conflict for fear that by referring to a judge they will certainly pay more than they think.

Second, Jesus evokes the prohibition of adultery by affirming that the simple fact of a lust toward a woman is already adultery within the heart and not only the fact itself. Therefore, he adds, it is better to be amputated of the members of the body if they are an occasion to sin than to go into hell with the whole body intact.

Third, Jesus refers to the permission given by Moses in acceptance of divorce by saying that to abandon his wife or to marry another for a reason other than unlawful marriage is simply to push her into adultery.

Finally, Jesus recalls the prohibition to take a false oath by saying that it is good not to swear at all. Therefore, he sustains that his followers should be determined so that whatever they say of yes or no, it should seriously be meant.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about Jesus' invitation to open up to the internal aspect of the Law. In fact, when someone goes to court, the first thing the judges want to know is if there is sufficient proof to support his case.

What they mean by proof is facts, evidence, and material data they can visit and analyze in order to establish the truth. No judgment can be based on a simple intentionality, but rather on facts and evidence.

It is here that the Gospel enters into play. For Jesus, indeed, the facts are just external. They do not do justice to the hidden dimension of the human person, namely his internal motivation. The reason for such a consideration lies in the fact that even if it cannot be proven, on the basis of facts, that a person has committed a crime, it does not exclude that he might have willed it in his heart.

That is why he makes a distinction between the external face of the person that human justice deals with by referring to the facts and the internal face that is hidden in the heart. His insistence on “You have heard that it was said”, “But I say to you” refers to that distinction between the external and the internal aspect of the Law.

The interesting question here is that of knowing why Jesus is keen to distinguish two sides in the human person, namely the internal and external. In fact, Jesus aims at helping us pursue the purity of heart so that what we do externally, which people see, might correspond to the veracity of our heart, which only God alone can see. In this way, we can avoid the dichotomy that leads to hypocrisy because it is easy to pretend that nothing bad was done on the basis of external facts while consciously, in the heart, a person knows well that his intention was not all pure and sane.

That is why he declares that it is not only the person who has committed murder who is guilty, but anyone who is angry with his fellow is liable to judgment. In the same way, it is not only the person who has committed adultery who is guilty, but anyone who entertains unclean thoughts in his heart about a woman. What Jesus says here is absolutely true, because even if it is true that we never killed a person, can we say that we never wished to harm someone? In the same way, even if it is true that we never committed adultery, can we say that we never had any thought in that sense about someone?

Such a consideration brings us to the reality of sin and a lesson of humility. In fact, it is impossible to claim our innocence before God on the simple basis of our respect of the Law. As Human experience has taught us, indeed, even those living a good external life of perfection still have internal conflicts with regard to the evil. That is why Jesus insists on the purity of eyes and hands.

If we understand all that, there is only one thing that is needed, namely to ask forgiveness for our sins in the sacrament of reconciliation, to reconcile with God and with our fellows. That is the grace we have to ask in this Eucharist. May God bless you all!

**Sirach 15: 15-20; 1 Corinthians 2: 6-10; Matthew 5: 17-37**



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