

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time A2023

Let me start this homily with an observation. 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. They have the freedom of speech, the freedom of association, Religious freedom, political freedom, etc. The events of January 6th, 2022 are called by some the freedom of protest.

However, to enjoy one's freedom does not mean to do anything someone wants. One's freedom stops where the others' freedom starts. When the enjoyment of any freedom is not respectful of the law it becomes illegal and punishable. This is true for any society in the world as well as for our relationship with God. No human freedom can exist independently of God's Law.

For sure, we are born as free human beings; but at the same time, we are accountable for any decision we make in our freedom. God, in his bounty, 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, we will certainly live and be saved. If, however, we choose the other path, the contrary will happen to us.

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. God's Law is not a limitation of our freedom, but rather a source of blessing and a help so that we assume our responsibility in the things we do.

That is what Jesus thinks of the law. He has come not to destroy the Law, but to fulfill it. He has come to give to the Law its real meaning and raise it to another level of interpretation and comprehension. What counts the most for him is not the external aspect of the law, but the inner motive that is known only to the one who acts and to God, and which pushes someone to act in one way or another.

A question that comes up is this: What is the essence of the law? The real meaning of the Law is reverence and respect. Reverence of God and his name, reverence of the day of God, respect of parents, respect of human life, respect of neighbor's property, respect of the other, respect of the truth, etc. Reverence and respect are the foundation and the basis of the Law. 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 had done, is to condemn ourselves to perdition.

Then, 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. The Law might refer to the past as it was given under Moses and the present to Jesus as it refers to his time, but there is no contradiction between them. On the contrary, there is continuity, because the present grows out of the past.

Jesus makes a distinction between the external aspect of the law and its internal aspect, the external fact and the internal motivation. The examples he gives about the law on murder, adultery, divorce or swearing makes clear the new way of interpreting the law he has come to bring. 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 in his heart about the opposite sex.

Thus, Jesus offers a new perspective in the interpretation of the law that goes from outside 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 it might happen that we never killed a person, but can we say that we never wished to strike someone or to harm him? It might be true that we never committed adultery, but 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 Commandments. 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.

We have to be humble enough and recognize that we are sinners and in need God's forgiveness. The sacrament of confession takes here all its importance. The habit of denigrating people because of their sins or of being condescending with others we judge as sinner is not fairly divine. We need to clearly understand that we cannot make straight our relationship with God if we do not make straight our relationship with our brothers and sisters. That is why Jesus reminds us that the reconciliation with God implies at the same time the reconciliation with our fellows.

Let us strive to keep ourselves pure of heart, mind and body. Let us ask the Holy Spirit the grace of keeping our baptismal 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 5: 17-37



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