

Readings: Ecclesiasticus 15: 15-20, Corinthians 2: 6-10, Matthew 5: 17 -37



Fr Michael says:

New Standards of Goodness

We are presented today with the vision of who we are, truly, as children of God. Our Reading from Ecclesiasticus stresses our freedom of choice, for good or evil; for life or death! Paul reminds us that ultimately true wisdom comes from God and our relationship with Him; it is here that we need to touch base with our ultimate importance, when we see what He has in store for us and all who love Him. Matthew extends our understanding by encouraging us to see more deeply – and widely, what is implicit in God’s Commandments. We go beyond the external reality of what we do, to touch on motivation. For example, in stressing the 5th Commandment, “Thou shalt not kill” we realise how our thoughts and feelings are involved even though we may not carry out the extreme form of the commandment. The same holds true for the 6th Commandment, in relation to how we live out and develop our relationships with others.

We are all subject to the Law, even Jesus was, as we see in His obedience to His parents as He grew up; how he kept the law of the land and God. So the key to our ultimate responsibility is our attitude. Jesus does not criticise the Law itself in this section of the Sermon on the Mount, but He does criticise how that Law was interpreted by the leaders of the People. It is not the letter of the Law which is important as the spirit in which it is carried out, as Jesus reveals in His life. Integrity of mind, heart and life are key to our living the Christian way of life.

The big danger in how the leaders of the People interpreted the Law is that it tends to be very minimalist in its approach – stressing the least thing that we should do. Jesus is very positive in how He interprets the Law – the 5th Commandment He would translate as “You must love your neighbour”. “Thou shalt not steal” as: “You must share your goods with your neighbour in need.” Another danger is that obedience to the Law was often rooted in fear, whereas for Jesus it was based on love, which is the very basis of His relationship with His Father: we are put in mind of St Augustine’s well known phrase: “Love and do what you will!” There can be no law – which limits necessarily – for love, which is total!

Jesus brings in a very exacting law of love in this way: the Law is obeyed and through love it is brought to perfection in how we go beyond what it says in how we respond, so it is not surprising that God’s Law can be summarised into two Commandments: love of God and love of neighbour!

“Grant, O Lord, that each day, before we enter the little death of sleep, we may undergo the little judgement of the past day, so that every wrong deed may be forgiven and every unholy thought set right. Let nothing go down into the depths of our being which has not been forgiven and sanctified. Then we shall be ready for our final birth into eternity, and look forward with hope and love to standing before you, who are both judge and saviour – holy and loving Saviour! (Bishop Appleton)



Fr Jean-Marie says:

Theme: A call to obey the Law and the Prophets

Keeping the commandments of God is a matter of good will and free choice. In the first reading from the book of Ecclesiasticus, we are told that if we want to we can keep God's commandments since we have the power within us to keep them. But God created us free to choose whatever we like and he trusts us to act responsibly by giving a response of love to his laws given for our happiness. Although we are free to choose, God does not expect us to choose sin because no one has permission to sin and to be godless.

On his side, in his Sermon on the Mount Jesus stresses **First** that his disciples must obey the Law and the Prophets because he did not come to abolish them but to complete them. He came to give them their full meaning and he reminds us that we have to keep those Laws if we are to be his servants. We cannot be choosy in what we believe but must believe whole-heartedly in the Lord and in his Laws and commandments. His message to us today is a call to obey the Law and the Prophets, but our faith is much more than rules and observances imposed from outside. Our faith is within us, in our hearts, and that faith tells us what to do; the Spirit is prompting us.

Second, Jesus reminds us that as disciples we must hold no grievances against our fellow men and women but must be reconciled with our brother and sister – that is, all those we meet or with whom we live before approaching the altar of God. We must lay aside all anger and resentment and live by the Law of the Lord in harmony and peace with one another and with God. Jesus tells us that anger is to be avoided just as murder is to be avoided. A Christian is to remove all occasions of anger from himself by seeking reconciliation.

Third, teaching about adultery, Jesus tells us that we must fight evil by removing all its roots in our lives. Anything that leads us to sin must be avoided and rejected. It is not enough for the community to be free of breaches of marriage trust, but lust, the very source of adultery, is to be removed, together with those occasions that lead to it. Then he speaks against divorce in favour the indissolubility of marriage. For Jesus, divorce is not in keeping with God's will.

Fourth, Jesus tells us that we should not swear and make oaths. He reminds us not to belittle God's name by using it in vain and so break the commandment – *"Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord your God in vain"*. Taking oaths reflects the distrust that we harbour against our neighbour. Such distrust has no place among Christians. A Christian has no need of such oaths. His response to God is sufficient warranty of his truthfulness and fidelity.

Finally our word should be sincere and when we say that we will do something then we should do it. If we are living truly Christian lives then people will need nothing more from us than a simple 'yes' or 'no.'

Let us pray today that people may believe in the love of God and be confident that the way he shows us in his commandments is the way of life. Amen