



Bible Study – Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A

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Parishes

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“I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Matt. 5:20 NABRE

Reading I: Sirach 15:15-20

YOU CAN DO BETTER! We grow up with rules. There are rules for everything. Rules rule! Here are a few that may sound familiar: *Rules of the House: If you sleep on it-make it up. If you wear it-hang it up. If you drop it- pick it up. If you eat out of it- wash it. If you spill it-wipe it up. If you turn it on- turn it off. If you open it-close it. If you move it-put it back. If you like it-share it. If you receive it-give thanks for it. If you lost it-find it or replace it. If you broke it-repair it.* Likewise, we should not be surprised to find rules in God’s world.

In the Old Testament, God gave rules to govern the conduct of the Chosen People. In the New Testament, Jesus gave the *purpose* behind the rules. He taught us that we must do better than just keeping the rules. We are called to live the rules according to His purpose.

The reading from Sirach focuses on the decision of Christians to follow the rules. We must constantly



“I place before water
and fire...” **CHOOSE!**

choose whether to follow the ways of the world, or the ways of Jesus Christ.

The Book of Sirach (once called Ecclesiasticus) is one of the wisdom books of the Old Testament. The wisdom literature from this book places our daily choices squarely before us. Stretch out your hands, Sirach challenges us, and choose fire or ice, life or death, God or the world. Written about 180 B.C. in Hebrew by *Eleazer ben Sirach*, it was translated into Greek by his grandson about 132 B.C. to benefit Jews exiled in Egypt who may have abandoned or forgotten the precepts of Mosaic Law. In these verses, he shows that God created people with free will who must serve God as a matter of choice. (v. 12 and vv. 16-17). In serving God, we choose life and water. In choosing worldliness, we choose death, fire and destruction. With free will comes responsibility. It requires us to always improve. God is neither the cause, nor the occasion of sin. We have the power to choose our behavior and we are responsible for both the good and the evil we do. We can do better than blame God for our faults. **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** Who do you blame for your choices?

WISDOM IN THE BIBLE

Wisdom in scripture is, “a moral rather than an intellectual quality. To be “foolish” is to be godless (Ps 14:1; comp. Judg. 19:23; 2 Sam 13:13). True wisdom is a gift from God to those who ask it (Job 28:12-28; Prov 3:13-18; Rom 1:22; 16:27; 1 Cor 1:17-21; 2:6-8; James 1:5).

“Wisdom” in Prov 1:20; 8:1; 9:1-5 may be regarded not as a mere personification of the attribute of wisdom, but as a divine person, **“Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God”** (1 Cor 1:24). In Matt 11:19 it is the personified principle of wisdom that is meant.” (From Easton’s Bible Dictionary, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 2003, 2006 Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

Reading II: 1 Corinthians 2:6-10

YOU CAN DO BETTER! St. Paul tells us that the Wisdom of God is better than the logic and wisdom of earthly rulers, who he calls immature. Some Corinthians were converted from Judaism, or other beliefs by God’s power and not by the power of persuasion, philosophy or logic – the wisdom of this age (v. 6). We too may have been converted from less sanctimonious lives, not by logic or reason, but by the power of the Holy Spirit. We became Christians in order to improve our lives by following Christ. We knew we could do better than to follow the ways of the world.

St. Paul argues that true wisdom is given to those who are capable of receiving it (v. 7). The Wisdom St. Paul proclaimed was Wisdom that God had not revealed previously (Eph. 3:2-12). This Wisdom was not a revelation in addition to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Gospel of Christ crucified personifies the Wisdom of God. He argues that the wisdom of the ages is inferior; since it is that wisdom (personified by the religious elite, Sadducees and Pharisees) that crucified Jesus, the Christ. The choices are clear. We can do better than relying on the logic of earthly wisdom for our reasons for faith in Jesus. We can rely on the Holy Spirit, who searches even the heart of God (v. 10). **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** Does your life style show your choice to follow Jesus?

Gospel: Matthew 5:17-37

YOU CAN DO BETTER! The philosopher, Immanuel Kant once said: *"In the law, a man is guilty when he violates the rights of others. In ethics, he is guilty if he only thinks of doing so."* Law can be described as the "moral minimum," that is, the least we can do to lead moral lives. How will the people of God's world, also known as the Kingdom of God, know if they are doing the right thing?

In the excerpts from the Sermon on the Mount in this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus gives a standard of conduct for those who would follow Him. Jesus tells us that *we can do better than the Commandments*. We can follow His standard of conduct, which is love of God and love of neighbor.

First, Jesus tells us what right conduct is by referring to the Commandments (v. 17). In His discussion of righteousness, that is, character and conduct that conform to the will of God, Jesus went back to God's Word revealed in the Old Testament. By saying, "...I have come to fulfill the Law," He authenticates the Old Testament as the inspired Word of God. In a sense, He tells us that we can do better than speculate on the value of the Old Testament. Since He is God, we have His Word that the Old Testament is the Word of God (vv. 18-19). Second, Jesus teaches that the code of conduct is not to break any of the laws, but also not to teach others to do so. He warns that we have to be better than the Pharisees who know the law, but don't live up to it (v. 20).

Third, Jesus teaches that we can do better than the Old Testament Law on murder (vv. 21-26). Quoting Leviticus 19:17, He tells us not to submit to the emotional cause of murder, which is anger.

Fourth, Jesus tells us that we can do better than the Old Testament Law on adultery (vv. 27-30). He tells us to cut away the cause of adultery, which is lust and sexual desire.

Fifth, he tells us that there is a better way than divorce. While divorce was permitted in Deut 24:1, love is demanded (v. 32).

Sixth, He assures us that it is better to tell the truth than to defile the name of God by swearing oaths to validate a lie. We must let our "yes" mean "yes" and our "no" mean "no" (v. 37). Truthfulness is the basis of all relationships. We can do better. We can choose to follow Jesus.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Which commandment is your favorite? Why? Which Commandment gives you the most difficulty? Why?

Pray About It!

Monday

Read Matt. 5:1-16, the Beatitudes. Be merciful today.

Tuesday

Read Rom. 1:22. Where do you get your wisdom?

Wednesday

Read Matt. 5:20. How can you improve your devotion to the Gospel of Christ?

Thursday

Read Matt. 5:21-26. Compliment someone today.

Friday

Read Eph. 3:2-12. Attend Mass and receive the Eucharist.

The Church Teachings on Free Will

1704 The human person participates in the light and power of the divine Spirit. By his reason, he is capable of understanding the order of things established by the Creator. By free will, he is capable of directing himself toward his true good. He finds his perfection "in seeking and loving what is true and good."

1705 By virtue of his soul and his spiritual powers of intellect and will, man is endowed with freedom, an "outstanding manifestation of the divine image."

1706 By his reason, man recognizes the voice of God which urges him "to do what is good and avoid what is evil." Everyone is obliged to follow this law, which makes itself heard in conscience and is fulfilled in the love of God and of neighbor. Living a moral life bears witness to the dignity of the person.

(Source: Catechism of the Catholic Church)

Resources: Matthew, Daniel J. Harrington; Collegeville Bible Commentary, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville Minn., p. 870- 871; Living Liturgy Spirituality, Celebration, and Catechesis for Sundays and Solemnities Year A 2014, Joyce Zimmerman, C. PP. S. Kathleen Harmon, S.ND. de N., Rev. John Tonkin, Liturgical Press Collegeville, Mn. 2016 pp. 54-57; Scripture texts in this work are taken from the New American Bible, revised edition © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C. and are used by permission of the copyright owner. All Rights Reserved. No part of the New American Bible may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner. http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/i/immanuel_kant.html#Z8rC40UHvhpJaD56.99; <https://net.bible.org/#!/bible/Matthew+5:31>

This meditation is prepared by Deacon Terrel J. Broussard for personal use in Adult Faith Formation at St. Peter Claver and St Maria Goretti Parishes in New Orleans, La. ©2014