

### **Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Over the last few weeks I have been watching the building of the new disability toilet and the upgrading of the older toilets. While we watch any building project, we can see the things that we cannot easily see when the project is complete. We can see where the insulation is in the walls and ceilings. We notice where the water pipes and electric cables are hidden. We see the foundation of the tiled floor. We can even count the layers of paint on the doors and walls. All these things will become hidden beneath the surface of the finished project that we see.

Today Jesus invites us to look beneath the surface of the commandments that we observe and so live more fully the life that he shares with us.

It is good to recall for whom Matthew was writing his gospel. It was a community of Jews who had become followers of Jesus. For this community their Jewish heritage was very important. Along with other faithful Israelites God's will for them was set out most clearly in the first five books of the Bible, commonly called the Torah or the Law of Moses. These books contained the commandments that shaped the lives of the faithful Israelites. For the faithful Israelites the Law was not so much something that was imposed upon them, but a gift that had been given to them so that they could

understand the will of God. Our psalm today captures something of the great love and deep respect that these people had for the Law. "Open my eyes that I may see the wonders of your Law. Teach me the demands of your statutes and I will keep them to the end. Train me to observe your law, to keep it with my heart." Our reading today from the Book of Ecclesiasticus presents following the Law as a free choice. "God has put fire and water before you: put out you're your hand to whichever you prefer. Humankind has life and death before him; whichever a person likes better will be given him."

Some people were saying that Jesus did not respect the Jewish Law. But Jesus tells his hearers today that he had not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets, but to complete them. We note first that Jesus includes what the prophets had said as part of the revelation of God's will for his people. He had come to complete the Law and the Prophets by interpreting for us the will of God for today and to go to the heart of what the Law of Moses was asking of us. Those who wanted to take their place in the kingdom of heaven would need to go far beyond the external observance of the Law.

Jesus uses six examples to illustrate what it means to really attend to what God wants. In each of them he quotes the Mosaic Law: "You have heard how it was

said.” and then with the authority that belongs to him as God’s Son he interprets that Law for us: “But I say this to you.” We look at the first four of his examples today. Next week we will look at the last two.

The first example is about murder. We may not intend to kill anyone today, but Jesus calls us to attend to the anger that may lead us to do things that harm other people. Jesus is concerned about what is happening within us. He wants us to notice what is happening below the surface, what is happening in our hearts. He calls us to do everything we can to be reconciled with each other. If we suspect that somebody might have something against us, we are to leave our offering at the altar and go and be reconciled with that person.

The second example is about adultery. Again, Jesus calls us to look at what may lead to that. He calls us to recognise what is happening within us and to see our sexuality as affecting the whole of our being. That is why Jesus tells us to cut off those parts of our body that lead us to sin. Jesus doesn’t want us to take him literally, but he says those things to shock us into recognising what may be in our hearts.

The third example is about divorce. He wants to take us beyond the arguments about whether divorce is allowed or not allowed under the Law, back to the ideal of what

marriage is meant to be. He calls a man and woman to love and respect each other as equals.

The fourth example is about breaking oaths. Jesus calls us to be people who have no need to take oaths, let alone break them. “All you need is to say ‘Yes’ if you mean yes. ‘No’ if you mean no.” Our concern for truth is part of our searching for God’s will for us.

These examples help us to understand what God wants for us. Jesus calls us to go beyond the letter of the Law and to respond to what God wants us to do by listening to what is happening in our hearts. When we listen to our hearts, we are in touch with a very special part of us. When we listen to our hearts, we discover that God’s love is already there. We are called to draw upon that love so that we can act towards one another in the way that God wills us to act.

This is part of the Wisdom that St. Paul speaks about today. “It is the wisdom that none of the masters of this age have ever known; we teach what scripture calls: the things that no eye has seen and no ear has heard, things beyond the mind of humans, all that God has prepared for those who love him. These are the things that God has revealed to us through the Spirit, for the Spirit reaches the depths of everything, even the depths of God.”