

## Commentary to the Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time (A)



Let's begin today by talking about the Gospel of Matthew today. This is the gospel that we will hear proclaimed the most this liturgical year. Matthew's gospel was written primarily for Christians who had first been Jews. These were Christians who were grounded in the scripture and traditions of the ancient Hebrews. The gospel also addressed Jews who were considering becoming Christians as well as all who wanted to learn more about this New Way, as our faith was first called.

Matthew's Gospel is structured with numerous references to the Torah, the most important part of the Hebrew Scripture. We know the Torah as the first five books of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. In the Gospel of Matthew there are five main talks or discourses of the Lord modeled on the five books of the Law or the Torah. The first main discourse of the Law is the one we call the Sermon on the Mount. Just as Moses went up Mount Sinai to bring the Ten Commandments, God's Law to the people, Jesus climbs the mountain of the Beatitudes to present the New Law to the people.

With this in mind we can understand Jesus's opening remarks in today's gospel: "I came not to abolish

the law and the prophets, but to fulfill them." In the eyes of the Lord the Hebrew Scripture are not only valid; they hold a place of greater reverence than ever before. But merely trying to keep the precepts of the ancient law was not enough. Jesus said something that was absolutely shocking. He said that the holiness of the people had to surpass that of the scribes and the pharisees. Now how could anyone be holier than the Pharisees? They dressed wearing numerous images of their religion--including phylacteries, or miniature lists of the ten commandments hung from their headbands so whenever they turned their head they would perform one of the laws that said: keep these commandments always before your eyes. They fasted. They said loud prayers for all to hear. But Jesus said that his followers had to be holier than these holy pharisees. How could that be possible? Well, Jesus explained, our external actions must be a reflection of what we really are like. It is not enough for others to see us performing the actions of Christians; our whole attitude in life must be Christian.

To demonstrate His point, Jesus contrasts the written law of the Torah with the new attitude of the Kingdom that must motivate the law. For example Jesus says, "You have heard it said that murder is wrong, but harboring hatred is also wrong even if you don't physically kill someone. Why? Because murder is conceived by hatred. The person who hates but does not murder is not a good person; he is just a person who has followed the social norms, perhaps to avoid punishment. It is the same with all the laws and rules of the New Kingdom. The fullness of the life of the Lord must motivate us rather than the minimal performing the law which motivated the ancient Jews.

One of the ways we can do this is by asking ourselves why we do the things that we do. For example, why do we share our possessions with others? We do this because people are infinitely more important than stuff. Or, why do we strive to develop our minds, whether we are in school or are long out of school? We do this because we have been given our gifts for others. Or why are we here in Church? We are here because we as individuals and as a community belong to God and He to us. We need to have this intimate union with Him as a community and as individuals in Scripture and the Eucharist.

It is not in the action itself but it is in the motivation behind the action where the Christian's true identity is found and formed. And that identity is the identity of Jesus Christ. We are called to take upon ourselves the very identity of Jesus Christ. We are called to be selfless givers. We are called to be eternal lovers of the Father. We are called to rejoice in His presence in our families. We are not called to be minimalists in the faith. We are called to develop the facility of finding meaning in the laws that God gave us so that our external actions might truly be a reflection of our internal attitudes.

So, is it easier to be a modern Christian than an ancient Jew? Absolutely not. Christianity is extremely demanding upon us all because it calls us to be 100% committed to living in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

When we make efforts to be wholesome, sincere, than our holiness, yours and mine, will surpass even that of the scribes and pharisees.

Tall order. Absolutely. And that is why we are here today. We are here to ask God to give us the grace to follow His Son.

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