

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Jun 13th 2014

In the Gospel we encounter Jesus preaching to his disciples about moral teachings in Jewish Law. This section of the Gospel according to Matthew is known as the “antitheses”, where Jesus names a biblical teaching and not only does he express agreement with it but he also goes a step further and invites his disciples to go deeper into the spirit of that moral teaching: “You have heard that it was said..., But I say to you...” These “antitheses”, are not really so, since Jesus does not express an opposition to the Jewish Law, like the word antithesis suggests, but an invitation to go further into the spirit of that Law, which had been given by God as a covenant with God’s people, Israel.

Jesus in the particular passage we read today brings up an issue that was probably very relevant and imminent for the community around Matthew. This would be adultery. Jesus explores the relationship between adultery and divorce and lust, and urges his disciples to realize that there is no need for a physical act to sin, but a mere lustful look or thought is adulterous. Jesus invites us not to get caught up in the letter of the law, but to go a step further, a step deeper into the spirit of the law and reflect on which is the root of adultery. Jesus suggests it is lust.

Furthermore, in the verses previous to the ones today, Jesus talks about murder being rooted in anger, and in verses following today’s reading, Jesus talks about swearing falsely being rooted in engaging in oaths altogether. Sin is not just the external, the physical, what other people see, but our own internal driving forces, our motivations. Jesus invites us to go to the root of our sin, to go into ourselves and pray for the grace of being able to find which the root or roots of our shortcomings, weaknesses, sins are. And in thanksgiving and humility, knowing that we are deeply and unconditionally loved by our Creator God, to pray and put the means necessary towards being more loving, since, like Saint Augustine puts it “...from this root (love) can nothing spring but what is good”.

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