

SIXTH SUNDAY IN  
ORDINARY TIME

YEAR A



**Prayer**

*Psalm 119:1-2, 4-5, 17-18, 33-34*

Happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD.

Happy are those who keep his decrees, who seek him with their whole heart,

You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently. O that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes!

Deal bountifully with your servant, so that I may live and observe your word. Open my eyes, so that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.

Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes, and I will observe it to the end. Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart.

**Reading the Word**

*Sirach 15:15-20*

If you choose, you can keep the commandments, and to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice.

He has placed before you fire and water; stretch out your hand for whichever you choose.

Before each person are life and death, and whichever one chooses will be given.

For great is the wisdom of the Lord; he is mighty in

power and sees everything; his eyes are on those who fear him, and he knows every human action.

He has not commanded anyone to be wicked, and he has not given anyone permission to sin.

*Second Reading:*

*1 Corinthians 2:6-10*

Among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written,

"What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him"—these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

*Gospel: Matthew 5:17-37*

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

FIRST READING

Sirach 15:15-20

PSALM

Psalm 119:1-2, 4-5, 17-18, 33-34

SECOND READING

1 Corinthians 2:6-10

GOSPEL

Matthew 5:17-37

Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

"You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire. So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be

*Scripture quotations from  
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thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell.

“It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

“Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.’ But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let your word be ‘Yes, Yes’ or ‘No, No’; anything more than this comes from the evil one.

## Hearing the Word

### *“Moulding the Heart”*

The last Sunday’s readings focused on the necessity for outward expression of one’s faith. This Sunday considers the interior effects of adherence

to Jesus’ and how the practice of faith transforms the person inwardly.

The book of Sirach belongs to the category of wisdom literature. Wisdom can be simply defined as the art of living wisely through making choices that lead to well-being, prosperity, and longevity. Wisdom literature acknowledges that a person has full capacity to discern what is good and right, and the freedom necessary to make independent choices regarding his or her behaviour. Wisdom books seek to motivate their readers to choose wisely through discussing the consequences of their choices, often appealing to the categories of “wisdom” and “folly.” The first leads to a full and blessed life, the second leads to death. Today’s first reading illustrates well this style of wisdom instruction.

The first part of the reading emphasises free will. A person is free to choose whether to follow God’s commandments or not. The respective outcomes of this choice are vividly described through two sets of graphic antitheses – fire and water, life and death. A person is invited to “stretch out the hand” to get hold of what their choice would bring.

Part two motivates the person to choose God’s ways, referring to “the wisdom of the Lord”, found in the commandments. While giving humanity freedom, God never commanded anyone to be wicked or gave them permission to sin. Still, as the guardian of the established order, God will ensure that human decisions will have appropriate consequences.

As a part of his exhortation to the Corinthians to put aside

their childish ways and to rise above petty divisions, Paul makes an appeal to God’s wisdom. Following the classic view of the Jewish wisdom literature, Paul understands that God’s wisdom surpasses all human understanding; it is hidden and mysterious. Wisdom was with God from the onset of creation, “from of old”, and God might choose to reveal her to his chosen ones. God’s wisdom reaches beyond the matters of the day-to-day living and concerns herself with creation and with the ultimate fate and destiny of all that there is. This type of wisdom directs human life towards “glory”, that is the sharing in God’s own life.

Paul motivates the Corinthians by pointing out to them their destiny of the followers of Christ; those who love God and are united to him have a glorious destiny that surpasses all imagination. How can the Corinthians gain access to the hidden wisdom of God and know his ways? This wisdom and knowledge comes through the Holy Spirit. Living according to the Holy Spirit makes them “mature.” It also sets them apart from others, who follow “the wisdom of this age.” These are the ignorant whose life is passing away. In this brief discourse Paul instructs the Corinthians to place themselves freely under the guidance of the Holy Spirit so that they can live wisely, with the focus on their eternal destiny.

The Gospel reading contains an extensive section of the “Sermon on the Mount”, closely related to today’s two other readings. First, Jesus emphasises that he does not intend to abolish the commandments but to “fulfil the law and the prophets”. Thus, his mission is to continue what

God has begun with revelation to the people of Israel, and to bring it to completion. The novelty of Jesus' work lies not in the introduction of an alternative set of precepts to guide human life, but in teaching the right way to fulfil what had already been revealed. Jesus illustrates this right way using three commandments as examples. These commandments regulate three of the most important and challenging spheres of human life: anger, sexuality and personal integrity.

Jesus begins with the commandment, "do not murder". Violence is endemic in human society, destroying lives and communities. It is the greatest enemy of harmony and well-being. Jesus immediately identifies the root cause of murder – anger. Without anger, murder and violence would not occur at all, the commandment would be fulfilled and followed. Jesus forbids even insults and insists on reconciliation before performing any religious duties as the means to preserve the harmony and peace in the community.

The second commandment is, "do not commit adultery." Unrestrained sexual desire destroys families. Again, Jesus identifies the root cause of adultery – lust. Using the metaphor of "tearing out the eye and cutting off the hand", he emphasises that sexual lust and other disruptions of the family life, such as divorce, must be avoided at all cost because they destroy the fundamental building block of the human community, the family.

The final commandment Jesus addresses is the prohibition of false testimony. Taking oaths was common in Jesus' day. An oath was taken to ensure that a person told the truth, or that

an action would be performed. Importantly, however, it was taken if the person swearing an oath was considered insufficiently reliable and trustworthy. In such a case, a reliable and trustworthy external witness by whom one swore was called upon to confirm the truth or to ensure that what was being sworn actually takes place. Oath taking was, and still is, a matter of personal integrity and commitment. Jesus forbids the practice. In his view personal integrity should ensure truthfulness and reliability, without the necessity for an eternal assurance.

In all these cases, Jesus' instruction on the fulfilment of commandments can be summarised though one principle – interiorize the commandment. Absence of anger and lust in the heart will remove the danger of murder and adultery. Personal integrity will ensure truthfulness and honesty in dealing with others. This approach differs from the common approach of Jesus' day where the emphasis was placed on an external observance of the commandments without addressing the state of the human heart. If the human heart is not transformed, then the commandments will repeatedly be violated. But if the human heart is transformed according to the ways of God's wisdom laid out in the commandments, then their fulfilment will be guaranteed. Jesus does not alter the commandments. He advocates their fulfilment through altering the human internal disposition and attitude. Thus, he takes the fulfilment of God's commandments to a new and a much deeper level.

Today's liturgy calls attention to the human responsibility to

make right and wise choices. God has established a certain order in creation, and in human society. An order which reflects his wisdom. Sirach emphasizes that human free will is active in the choice to live wisely, by adhering to God's commandments, which amounts to choosing life over death. Paul wrote about God's eternal wisdom that leads to the heavenly glory, motivating the Corinthians to rise above their childish quarrels and live as wise and mature believers. Jesus taught the disciples that the right way to adhere to God's order and fulfil his commandments is to allow their hearts to be moulded according to his teaching. This teaching was beautifully summarised earlier by the prophet Jeremiah who spoke of having God's law written on the heart (cf. Jer 31:33). Those who understand and embrace this teaching can only pray with the Psalmist, "give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart".

### **Listening to the Word of God**

Many people in the Church today have not undergone a change of heart. Many talk about Christianity but their hearts are the same as those who make no claim to belief. Many of us talk about Christianity because we have learned its truths and it is not too difficult to appear knowledgeable about God's ways. We can easily carry on conversations about faith and about the Christian life. It is easy to think that I am a Christian because I know all the things and all the stories and all the truths. Maybe you are a leader or a great choir master or you have told all

kinds of people about Jesus and led many to him, yet if your own heart does not react as the heart of Christ then you are not truly Christian.

Often we know what is the right thing to do but we do not do it. Instead of having loving, warm and friendly fellowships in this world, we often withdraw more and more from each other and become selfishly self-centred. Our hearts become cold and then our relationship with God falls apart and our relationships with others are disrupted. We feel anger, we gossip, criticize or are irritable, we become resentful, hateful, violent and sexually promiscuous. We know the consequences of such attitudes, especially the pain we inflict upon others, but our hearts grab every opportunity to tear somebody else down in the public eye and build ourselves up. Separation, divorce, sexual transgressions are other consequences of a divided and unformed heart.

Unfortunately, many in our society and Church do not have Christ-shaped hearts. We find ourselves with hearts that are far from the heart of Christ. We need hearts that are different from those who do not live in a Christ-like way, hearts that are kind to our spouses, our children and those with whom we come into daily contact. One way to mould and change our hearts is to place ourselves in somebody else's shoes, to imagine that we are living their life. Then we will be better able to see how they feel if they fail to find in us a tender, kind father or an understanding husband or wife or a dear roommate. We will be able to imagine what they

experience when they come up against the hard indifference or anger or lust or exploitation that comes from us.

As Christians we are called to change our hearts so that they reflect the tender affection of Jesus' heart directed to all humanity. Let's us be honest and self-critical in acknowledging where we fail in this regard. Our God wants us to live according to his ways found in the commandments and teaching of Jesus. He trusts that we can do it and teaches us that we must pay attention to our hearts and shape them through the practice of prayer and by growing through knowing his teaching in an ever deeper way. We can always count on Jesus' help. He came to baptize us with the Holy Spirit and to mould our hearts. By being open to him and his grace our hearts will surely be changed.

### Proverb

“When  
there is  
no enemy  
within, the  
enemies  
outside  
cannot  
hurt you.”

### Action

#### Self-examination

What are the positive, Christ-like emotions and desires that I carry and experience in my heart?

What are the negative and destructive emotions and desires that I carry and experience in my heart?

#### Response to God

I pray for a change of my heart, a new heart full of tender affection for Jesus' heart. I pray for the healing of my wounds and destructive emotions, so that I may be a channel of blessing and healing.

#### Response to your World

What concrete steps can I take to strengthen the positive Christ-like emotions and desires of my heart so that they can push out the negative and destructive ones?

We identify the violations of commandments that operate in our community (group, family, parish, school, ethnic group, gender group). What steps can we take to stop those violations?

### Prayer

Father, I am grateful for your gracious offer to give me a new heart, one that loves you, one that is tender and responsive to your voice and one that reflects your love back to everyone in my life, friend and foe alike.

Create for me that new heart and new Spirit so that I will walk guided by this new heart and care for this new spirit by my commitment to your Word and by seeking your face through prayer and worship. Amen