

## GOSPEL

MATTHEW 5:17-37

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish them but to complete them. Therefore, the man who infringes even one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be considered the least in the kingdom of heaven; but the man who keeps them and teaches them will be considered great in the kingdom of heaven.

'For I tell you, if your virtue goes no deeper than that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven.

'You have learnt how it was said to our ancestors: You must not kill; and if anyone does kill he must answer for it before the court. But I say this to you: anyone who is angry with his brother will answer for it before the court; if you are bringing your offering to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first, and then come back and present your offering.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

A Reflection by Pope Francis

Today's liturgy presents us with another passage of the *Sermon on the Mount*, which we find in the Gospel of Matthew. In this passage, Jesus wants to help his listeners to reread the Mosaic law.

What had been said in the ancient covenant was true, but that was not all: Jesus came to *bring to fulfillment* and to promulgate in a definitive way the Law of God, up to the last iota. He manifests its original aims and fulfils its authentic aspects, and he does all this through his preaching and, even more, with the offering of himself on the Cross. In this way, Jesus teaches how to fully carry out God's will, and he uses these words: with a 'righteousness' that 'exceeds' that of the scribes and the Pharisees. A righteousness enlivened by love, charity, mercy, and hence capable of fulfilling the substance of the commandments, avoiding the risk of formalism. Formalism:

this I can, this I cannot; up to this point I can, up to this point I cannot.... No: more, more.

In particular, in today's Gospel, Jesus examines three aspects, three commandments [that regard] murder, adultery and swearing.

With regard to the commandment 'you shall not kill', he states that it is violated not only by murder in effect, but also by those behaviours that offend the dignity of the human person, including insulting words. Of course, these insulting words do not have the same gravity and culpability as killing, but they are set along the same line, because they are the pretext to it and they reveal the same malevolence. Jesus invites us not to establish a ranking of offences, but to consider all of them damaging, inasmuch as they are driven by the intent to do harm to one's neighbour. Jesus gives an example. Insulting: we are accustomed to insulting; it is like saying "good morning". And that is on the same line as killing. One who insults his brother, in his heart kills his brother. Please do not insult! We do not gain anything....

Another fulfillment is generated by the matrimonial law. *Adultery* was considered a violation of man's property right over the woman. Instead, Jesus goes to the root of the evil. As one comes to killing through injuries, offences and insults, in this way one reaches adultery through covetous intentions in regard to a woman other than one's own wife. Adultery, like theft, corruption and all the other sins, are first conceived in the depth of our being and, once the wrong choice is made in the heart, it is carried out in concrete behaviour. Jesus says: one who looks with a covetous spirit at a woman who is not his own is an adulterer in his heart, has set off on the path towards adultery. Let us think a little bit about this: about the wicked thoughts that go along this line.

Jesus then tells his disciples not to swear, as swearing is a sign of the insecurity and duplicity with which human relationships unfold. God's authority is exploited so as to guarantee our human narrative.

Instead, we are called to establish among ourselves, in our families and in our communities, a climate of clarity and mutual trust, so that we can be considered sincere without resorting to greater tactics in order to be believed. Mistrust and mutual suspicion always threaten peace!

May the Virgin Mary, a woman of listening and joyful obedience, help us to draw ever closer to the Gospel, to be Christians not 'of façade', but of substance! This is possible with the grace of the Holy Spirit, who allows us to do everything with love, and thus to wholly fulfil the will of God.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Reconciliation is often very difficult. Have you ever experienced a situation where you needed to reconcile with someone because of something you did? How did you go about it and what happened?
- It has been said that reconciliation is about the relationship and forgiveness is about the offence. Do you think you its possible to forgive someone even if they do not want reconciliation?
- Do you seek forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation? Can you share an experience of the Sacrament and how has it helped you?

## PRAYER

*Spend some time in prayer with one another*

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.