

GOSPEL

Matthew 5: 20-22. 27-28. 33-34. 37

Jesus said to his disciples: 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.

‘You have learnt how it was said: You must not commit adultery. But I say this to you: if a man looks at a woman lustfully, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

‘Again, you have learnt how it was said to our ancestors: You must not break your oath, but must fulfil your oaths to the Lord. But I say this to you: do not swear at all. All you need say is “Yes” if you mean yes, “No” if you mean no; anything more than this comes from the evil one.’

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

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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.

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REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



Head: What do you think of the idea that “serious sin”, such as murder, exists on “the same line” as insult?



Heart: How do your inner feelings about people around you impact your behaviour towards them?



Hands: How can we create a “climate of clarity and mutual trust” in our relationships with those around us?

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. Offer 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 praying the ‘Glory Be’.