

FEBRUARY 12, 2017 SUNDAY

Reading 1 SIR 15:15-20

If you choose you can keep the commandments, they will save you; if you trust in God, you too shall live; he has set before you fire and water to whichever you choose, stretch forth your hand. Before man are life and death, good and evil, whichever he chooses shall be given him. Immense is the wisdom of the Lord; he is mighty in power, and all-seeing. The eyes of God are on those who fear him; he understands man's every deed. No one does he command to act unjustly, to none does he give license to sin.

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

R. (1b) Blessed are they who follow the law of the Lord!

Blessed are they whose way is blameless,
who walk in the law of the LORD.

Blessed are they who observe his decrees,
who seek him with all their heart.

R. Blessed are they who follow the law of the Lord!

You have commanded that your precepts
be diligently kept.

Oh, that I might be firm in the ways
of keeping your statutes!

R. Blessed are they who follow the law of the Lord!

Be good to your servant, that I may live
and keep your words.

Open my eyes, that I may consider
the wonders of your law.

R. Blessed are they who follow the law of the Lord!

Instruct me, O LORD, in the way of your statutes,
that I may exactly observe them.

Give me discernment, that I may observe your law
and keep it with all my heart.

R. Blessed are they who follow the law of the Lord!

Reading 2 1 COR 2:6-10

Brothers and sisters: We speak a wisdom to those who are mature, not a wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age who are passing away. Rather, we speak God's wisdom, mysterious, hidden, which God predetermined before the ages for our glory, and which none of the rulers of this age knew; for, if they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written: *What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him*, this God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit scrutinizes everything, even the depths of God.

Alleluia CF. MT 11:25

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Blessed are you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth;
you have revealed to little ones the mysteries of the kingdom.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel MT 5:17-37

Jesus said to his disciples: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. Amen, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter will pass from the law, until all things have taken place. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the kingdom of heaven. I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. "You have heard that it was said to your ancestors, *You shall not kill; and whoever kills will be liable to judgment*. But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; and whoever says to his brother, 'Raqa,' will be answerable to the Sanhedrin; and whoever says, 'You fool,' will be liable to fiery Gehenna. Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Settle with your

opponent quickly while on the way to court. Otherwise your opponent will hand you over to the judge, and the judge will hand you over to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Amen, I say to you, you will not be released until you have paid the last penny. "You have heard that it was said, *You shall not commit adultery*. But I say to you, 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 to have your whole body thrown into Gehenna. 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 to have your whole body go into Gehenna. "It was also said, *Whoever divorces his wife must give her a bill of divorce*. But I say to you, whoever divorces his wife - unless the marriage is unlawful -causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. "Again you have heard that it was said to your ancestors, *Do not take a false oath, but make good to the Lord all that you vow*. But I say to you, do not swear at all; not by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is his footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Do not swear by your head, for you cannot make a single hair white or black. Let your 'Yes' mean 'Yes,' and your 'No' mean 'No.' Anything more is from the evil one."

Reflection:

Jesus gives six striking examples and, in today's Gospel, we have four of them. In these four examples Jesus helps us to understand that, to be one of his disciples, it is not enough simply to keep what the Law tells us to do. We do not keep the Law through our behaviour but through our basic attitudes, our basic values. When the Pharisees kept the Law they wanted to obey God but very often they neglected the needs of others. It was their own "perfection" they were mainly concerned about (just as we can be exclusively concerned about being in a "state of grace"). Even now, some people in confession are sorry because their sins offend God or are instances of personal failure but often they show little awareness of how their sins hurt other people. For Jesus, we cannot separate our relationship with God and our relationship with people. If we cannot find God in our brothers and sisters, we cannot say that we really love God. "As often as you did not do it to them, you did not do it to me." Or in the words of the First Letter of John: "If you refuse to love, you must remain dead; to hate your brother is to be a murderer" (1 John 3:15).

Do not kill : The first example from the Law that Jesus gives is, "Do not kill." But Jesus says we must not even get angry or use insulting words with others. What Jesus is saying is that we must deeply respect the dignity and rights of every person, a person who is unconditionally loved by God and for whom Jesus will sacrifice his life. And if we do not respect our brothers and sisters deep within our heart, we cannot say we respect God. So if I am going to the Temple to pray (a religious act of worship) and I remember I have offended someone, I should go and reconcile with my brother first and only then make my offering in the Temple. Otherwise, my prayers and offering are of no real value. *Life and worship*: Life and worship cannot be separated: each influences the other. Yet, how often do we piously go to Mass when we have deeply hurt another person and need to reconcile with him or her? We cannot say we love Jesus if we are hurting others. That is the meaning of the sign of peace which we share with others before sharing in the communion. And, where possible, it would be great to make a point of giving the sign of peace sincerely to a person with whom we have a problem, a person we may criticise or dislike, or someone who is a foreigner or a complete stranger. If we cannot do this, we may question the genuineness and integrity of our communion. *Do not commit adultery*: "You must not commit adultery." Adultery is having sexual relations between two people, of whom at least one is already married. In Jewish Law there were very serious penalties for this. We remember the woman who was brought to Jesus to be stoned, because that was what the Law demanded. Jesus, however, says you can commit adultery in your thoughts (and nobody knows about it -- except you). Again Jesus is saying that, apart from our external actions, our basic attitude is paramount. We cannot just use another person just as an object to give us pleasure. We cannot use another person like a toy. When that happens both are degraded. Real love is completely different. Real respect is completely different. And adultery is wrong not so much because it is a sexual act outside marriage but because it is an act of serious injustice to the innocent married partner and seriously injures the marriage relationship. It is a serious breach of trust and fidelity. *No divorce*: The Law also says, "Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce." In Jesus' time, it was relatively easy to divorce. If a husband became attracted to another woman, he just made an official declaration that he was divorcing his wife. It could be for very trivial reasons. She could do nothing. She had no say in the matter. It was legal but, according to Jesus, it was against the dignity and the rights of the wife. It was legal but it was both selfish and unjust. It was legal but also immoral. For Jesus, it is not enough for something to be legal. It must also be good. It must also be an expression of love and justice. That is something we need to remember. Immoral acts are not less moral because they do not happen to be against the law

or because I am no longer a practising Catholic.

Collapsed relationships: It would seem that Jesus is dealing here with divorce for selfish reasons. In our time, divorce is often the result of a marriage having irretrievably broken down. In Jesus' time, love or happiness had very little to do with marriage. It was governed by the laws and by tradition and was seen primarily as the bringing together of two families with the purpose of producing heirs. The matter is more complex in our own time and we have also distinguish between obtaining a civil divorce (which Catholics can do) and having a second sacramental marriage (which, under the present legislation, Catholics may not do). And there are other issues involved in the question of divorce but they can be dealt with more fully when we deal with the question later (27th Sunday, Year B) *No false swearing:* "Don't swear falsely! Carry out what you vow." It was common in Jesus' time for people to guarantee the truth of what they said by making a solemn oath before God. Jesus' point is that a good Christian does not have to swear at all, because a true Christian is a reliable and totally honest person. He or she is a person of integrity. Such people can be trusted when they speak. They don't have to give external guarantees. Their 'Yes' or 'No' means what is said and there are no mental reservations. It is pleasure to meet people like that who are totally transparent and have nothing to hide. *Catholics and the law:* There are not a few Catholics who feel that if they just keep the Commandments they are good Catholics. They often like to ask, "Is this a sin?", that is, is it against the law? Is it a mortal sin or is it a venial sin? If it is "only" a venial sin, then I can do it. But true Christians do not ask whether something is legal or illegal. They love God, they love Jesus, they love their brothers and sisters. Their only concern is how they can serve and love them more and more. They want to work with Jesus and with his brothers and sisters to build the Kingdom of God. No matter how much they do, they know they can still love more and do more and be more. It is not a question of law; it is not a question of what I have to do. It is a question of how much more I can do, how much more I want to do. The requirements of the law are way behind.