

6th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

St. Matthew 5:17-37

In the beginning God gave one law, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die” (*Genesis 2:16-17*). But we could not cope with that. Then God gave ten laws. But we could not cope with that either. The Jewish Law then formed 614 laws. That was too much to cope with. So, in the end, the Lord gave us two commands: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets’ (*Mt 22:37-40*).

In the Lord’s own words: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill” (*Mt 5:17*). In His commandment, the greatest commandment, He showed how the Law and the Prophets of the Old Covenant were always oriented to the love of God and the love of man. The fall of man, however, meant that we looked for ways around the Law, to make it suit what we wanted, to suit what we preferred to believe. So more and more laws were introduced in the Jewish faith to define further the boundaries of our humanity and direct it to its proper end.

In the same way we grew up with the idea of more and more laws and regulations and rules because these define the boundaries of our relationship with others, mainly to protect ourselves and others. The Church herself teaches that children cannot commit personal sin until they have reached the age of reason. Prior to that time a great deal is accepted and a great deal forgiven. But as they grow children are expected to bear greater responsibility and to

understand the consequences of their actions, whether good or bad. From the dawn of humanity the imposition of law meant that we rebelled and sought what we claimed to be our freedom. From the time of childhood we rebel against the imposition of rules and seek that which we think is our freedom. Today more than any other time in history there are demands for freedoms, for respect of privacy, for individual rights. Today there are more laws than at any other time in history. It seems that demands for freedom necessitate more and more laws. It would seem that this is an expression of the lack of orientation in our society towards the common good, towards love of God, towards love of neighbour.

The Lord said that “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 brother will be liable to judgment.” Here no longer is murder reserved to the death of the flesh but to the death of character. It means that gossip, unfair judgements, uncharitable words are tantamount to murder for we seek to tear down our neighbour. The Lord said that “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.” Here no longer is adultery an act of betrayal defined by the physical for it cannot but be an act that is also spiritual. To be with a man or a woman for no other reason than lust reduces that person to an object devoid of a soul, and there is no difference whether that act is committed in the flesh or in the mind and heart. In redefining these laws the Lord did not change them but gave them their true and proper direction.

We can look on the history of humanity in the same way that we can look on the history of an individual; in the beginning the child is guided gently but as he grows he is expected to understand more, to do more, to be responsible for more. In the same way the history of our salvation is a history of our Father in Heaven guiding gently His young people but as they grew more was

expected, more was given to understand, more was demanded. And why? Because just as the joy of a mother and father lies in the life of their child who one day will grow to manhood or womanhood, so the glory of God lies in man who takes up his mission to participate in the work of God—to become man fully alive.

“[In] the fullness of time... God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God” (Gal 4:4-7). The one, true faith into which you and I have been baptised is not a faith of children but a faith of grown men and women.

The American poetess Maya Angelou wrote: “I did then what I knew how to do. Now that I know better, I do better.” We must stand as men and women of faith in the Christ the Lord, empowered by the Holy Spirit, seeking always our Father in Heaven and we must say with St. Paul: “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways” (I Cor 13:11).