

16th February 2020 (6th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A)

Ecclesiasticus 15:16-21; Psalm 118(119):1-2,4-5,17-18,33-34; 1 Corinthians 2:6-10; Matthew 5: 17-37.

God never commanded anyone to be godless; he has given no one permission to sin!

The gospel of Matthew we are reflecting upon this year, is written for a Jewish Christian community that is struggling to understand its place within the Jewish world. This community is trying to find an answer to those who are accusing its members that they have abandoned God's teachings in the Torah. Matthew responds that this is not so: Jesus has not come to abolish the Torah, but to bring it to fulfilment and draw out its full meaning. It is interesting to note that while other passages in Matthew's gospel have parallels in the gospels of Mark and Luke, this passage has no corresponding parallels.

I presume that Matthew's response to the Jewish critics of his community does not go down well. Matthew's re-interpretation of the Torah is more difficult to follow than the original teachings. The original teachings are instructions about one's outward behaviour; Jesus' fulfilment invites people to a deeper living of God's will. Jesus fulfils the Torah by inviting his disciples to look at God's teachings from God's own perspective.

Earlier in this chapter, Jesus pronounces blessed, those who empty themselves in order to fill themselves with the Spirit of God. In the beatitudes, the poor, those who grieve, those who hunger and thirst for justice, are certainly not putting themselves first, but the human situation they are surrounded with. These are the ones who can experience God's presence in their life, they are open to receive and be guided by God's Spirit. (In line with the two teachings by Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* in 2015, and now *Querida Amazonia*, I wonder if a ninth beatitude could be: 'blest are they who cry and protest at our environmental calamity, they experience God's face in nature!')

Jesus teaches us that in order to witness to the gospel and be salt and light to the world, we cannot simply pay lip service to the word of God and conform to it outwardly. The word of God requires a total commitment. We are called to surrender ourselves totally to God's Spirit in our life. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul speaks of Jesus who, for us and for our sins, emptied himself in total obedience to the Father (2:6-11). This is also expected of the Christian who has been born again in Christ!

Jesus tells us that I may not have killed, bullied, hurt or abused anyone emotionally, sexually or physically, but if I am harbouring hate in my heart and have not yet forgiven my sister or brother who has offended me, then I am as guilty as if I had actually acted out my feelings. Jesus goes even further. He says that if I suspect that my sister or brother feels that I have hurt them in any way, then it is more important for me to go and humble myself in front of them and apologise, than to go to church and spend hours in prayer on my own! Sin is born in the heart long before it is expressed verbally or physically. Feelings of anger and hate are a clear sign that I have not yet turned over my whole life to God's will!

Similarly, I may not have cheated on my partner, or approached another person inappropriately, but if my heart is not completely given over to the person I have committed myself to, then I am living in adultery. The final act of rejection of my partner is the result of my lack of total commitment to the person with whom I have promised to share my whole life. We are invited to love as God loves us, giving up himself totally and completely for our sake. Anything less, Jesus says, is incomplete and sinful.

This is the type of witness our world needs today: a witness to total commitment to God. There is no space for us to be divided between two masters. In our Baptism we have offered ourselves totally and completely to God, and I need to witness to the world this complete trust in God.

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