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Homily at Mass 6th Sunday in Ordinary Time – 16 February 2020

St Paul speaks of wisdom which is a sign of Christian maturity – a wisdom that contradicts the philosophy of our times and those who attempt to shape and direct the way we think and speak and act, the “influencers” of our culture and society. The Wisdom author of today’s Old Testament reading seems to take us by the hand, to sit down and listen to Our Lord’s teaching in the Gospel – to listen, to allow our Lord’s teaching to touch our hearts, to shine its own light on our minds and thinking. And Jesus speaks directly and clearly to us – not in parables or stories today, but in clear speech. We understand what our Lord has to say, and we take it on board.

Our Lord asks us today, how deep does your religion go? How deep are your convictions, your belief? What sort of a disciple are you? He is critical of scribes and pharisees, the religious leaders of New Testament times, because he says their religion, their convictions, their faith was no more than skin deep. Jesus demands much more of those who bear the name of Christian and profess faith in him and his Gospel. Otherwise the likes of you and me are open to criticism and suspicion. Of all of us, I suppose, priests are especially conscious of this because our name and reputation has been dragged through the mud because of the disgraceful crimes of some priests. Never before has the idea of a priest as “another Christ” been so demanding and the expectations on us by the Faithful and priests themselves been so high, so demanding, so necessary.

In our times the necessity for our priests and bishops to be holy, prayerful, whole heartedly devoted to Christ and loyal to his Church, faithful to clerical dress, and joyful in their vocation – all of these things are absolutely paramount now. A priest must find himself at the Altar each day for Mass. A priest’s ministry flows from the Sacrifice of Christ. Prayer and friendship with God must be the beginning and end of a priest’s day. A priest is a priest on the street, in the church, on the school yard, with his family, in the homes of his parishioners, as well as when he is alone in the presbytery working, writing, reading, relaxing, on his day off and or holidays. Each day a priest must believe once again that Christ the Priest is the Lord of his heart and his life.

When we think of the Commandments we remember that there are 10 of them, and that they fall into 2 groups – the first 3 direct our relationship with God; the second group of 7 speak of our relationships with others. I am the true and living God, God says – you must serve me, love me, worship me alone. God comes first in our lives. We speak his name only in praise and prayer. Our priority each Sunday is the worship of God – just where we are, here and now, in God’s house.

The second stone tablet of the Commandments is summed up in today’s Gospel teaching: “You must not kill ... you must not commit adultery ... you must keep your oaths and promises”. The crime of murder is one thing – to destroy someone’s good name and reputation is another. Gossip is often if not always hurtful. Social media has become a tool that destroys the good name and character of others – young people find this especially, it is part of the bullying culture they can experience at school. St Paul says in one of his letters, use words that build up and encourage one another.

“You must not commit adultery”. In this Commandment God calls us to live marriage and family life, to respect the gift of life, to embrace our children and raise them because they are a blessing as well as responsibility entrusted to us by God our Creator. It’s a good thing, I think, for husbands and wives to recall their wedding Wow especially in the moments after Holy Communion. And looking at our children sitting beside us, or in many cases no longer regular at Sunday Mass, to list the names of our children before God in thanksgiving, in blessing, and even a cry from the heart.

Keep your oaths – “yes” must mean “yes” and “no” must mean “no”. We rightly get annoyed with politicians who are fickle with their promises. How often do mum and dad battle with their children’s accusation “but you said”. For us truth has its own value. To keep your word, to be a person of your word is an outstanding value. To have a reputation for honesty, sincerity and truthfulness – that’s what we need not just in our politicians, but especially in you and me.