

## **Homily of Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time Year A**

The first reading says, "If you choose you can keep the commandments, they will serve you; if you trust God, you 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." God gives each of us the free will which makes us responsible for our choices and our actions. Bad choices and actions have bad consequences, while good choices and actions have good rewards. This is in line with the natural law of cause and effect. However, God has given us his Holy Spirit to lead us, guide us and direct us. We pray that we will cooperate with the leading, the guiding, and the directing of the Holy Spirit in order to make choices that are pleasing to God, and for our good.

However, we need to recognize the fact that there are times conditions or situations take away one's free will to choose what to do and what not to do. At such times, we can only trust God. May God save us from such conditions and situations. May our guardian angels always guard us. This is why it is important to constantly surrender ourselves to God, and keep ourselves always in his presence.

Matthew Chapters 5 to 7 contains extensive and powerful preaching and instructions by Jesus. In Chapter 7, Jesus raises himself above Moses and the Mosaic Laws, and shows himself as possessing divine authority. Six times in the Gospel reading Jesus declared, "I say to you" / "I tell you," to re-interpret Mosaic Laws. Matthew 7:28-29 acknowledges the response of the people, "When Jesus finished these words, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes."

Today, Jesus is not addressing the scribes and the Pharisees, and the crowds but us. In today's Gospel reading, Jesus addresses the ways and manners of selective interpretation of civil laws and religious laws. Unfortunately, every selective interpreter claims to be truthful and honest. Jesus tells us to possess true righteousness which surpasses hypocrisy. True righteousness goes beyond the external observance. Several layers of pretense mask external observance.

Internal disposition matters very much. We can pretend to be friendly to someone, but deep within us we harbor grudges and are angry with that person. We can pretend to be friendly with someone but deep within us we regard that person as a fool. We can pretend to be 'holier than thou' but are defiled inside with evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, and folly (Mark 7:23). Jesus reminds us that it is only external observance and hypocrisy when we worship God with hearts and bodies infested with sin. It is for this reason that Jesus says in Matthew 15:8, "This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me." And in today's Gospel he says, "Go first and reconcile with your brother / sister, and then come to offer your gift." Because, "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord; but the prayer of the upright is his delight" (Proverbs 15:8).

Jesus says, "Do not swear at all." Since taking vows, oaths, and swearing in ceremonies are found in almost every culture, we can understand this saying of Jesus to mean that we should never swear falsely. Let our 'Yes' mean our 'Yes,' and let our 'No' mean our 'No.' Unfortunately, we take vows and oaths and hardly keep them. Unfortunately, people raise their hand or place it on the Scripture and swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, and almost immediately they tell lies.

Jesus tells us that if our right eye, or our right hand causes us to sin, we need to get rid of it for it is better for us to lose one of our members than to have our whole body go into Gehenna (hell). This saying of Jesus is not to be taken literally. Jesus is encouraging us to cut off from whatever that can lead us to sin no matter how precious what we cut off from is to us. St. Paul's words are apt to interpret the passage and so summarize our reflection: "I urge you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship. Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect" (Romans 12:1-2).

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