

6th Sunday OT, A

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today's gospel would not let us make those simple and inaccurate distinctions. Jesus' words show continuity and consistency between the Old and the New Testaments, not separation and opposition. According to Jesus, it is not just for murder that we will be held liable, but also for anger, insult, and name-calling. By his definition, adultery is not solely determined by physical relationships but by the thoughts, desires, and fantasies within us. In Jesus' eyes, divorce might sometimes be legal, but it always carries lasting consequences. For Jesus, honesty and truth-telling are not to be governed by an oath but by every word we speak.

If we thought Jesus would cut us some slack on the law, we need to think again. He seems to be doing just the opposite. Jesus does not reject the law. Far from it, he intensifies it. He does not change the law; he interiorizes it. That means life is lived from the inside out, and the quality of our relationships arises from and is determined more by what is going on within us than by what is going on around or outside us.

Jesus' intensifying and interiorizing of the law means that we cannot live as one person on the inside and another on the outside. It is a remedy for living a divided and fragmented life. To the degree we are divided within ourselves, one person on the inside and another on the outside, we will be separated from God and each other.

Jesus is more interested in our lives and relationships being put back together and made whole than he is in superficial compliance with the rules. I think that is why he intensifies and interiorizes the law. I think that is also why he is so critical of the scribes and Pharisees. It is why, at the beginning of today's gospel, he says that unless our righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, we will never enter the kingdom of heaven. The law was never intended to be the goal. It was always intended to be a means of establishing, nurturing, and protecting relationships.

We can too easily forget that the law is more about relationships than it is about rules. When that happens, we are in grave danger of keeping the rules and losing the relationship.

To be faithful to Christ, we must take an honest look within ourselves and answer some hard questions. In what ways is our life divided and fragmented? Are we living as one person on the inside and another on the outside? Have we kept the rules but lost the relationship?

Most of us have probably never murdered another person. But have our anger, insults, or name-calling left another dead to us so that they are just no longer a part of our world? We may not be in an adulterous affair, but have our thoughts, fantasies, or the way we see and perceive another objectified and depersonalized another? This is about more than sexuality. It happens every time we dehumanize and strip another of life, making them a thing to be used. Maybe we have never been divorced, or if we have, there were good reasons, and it was necessary because sometimes

that is the reality, but there is a deeper question. Have we treated another as disposable, here today, gone tomorrow, as if we had no need of them and they had no inherent value?

Perhaps that's part of what intensifying and interiorizing the law looks like. Jesus is not trying to make things harder, to trap us, condemn us, or judge us, but to make us whole, to put our lives and relationships back together so that our "yes" really is "yes" and our "no" really is "no."

Obedience to the law is more than just keeping the rules. It is, ultimately, keeping the relationship. That is a choice each one of us makes every moment of every day. That choice comes from deep within us. It is the choice between life and death. Isn't that what we heard in the first reading from Sirach? *"Before man are life and death, good and evil, whichever he chooses shall be given him."*

The good news is that God gives us what we choose. The bad news is that God gives us what we choose. The choice is life or death, physical, emotional, and spiritual. Let's not think this is only about our life or our death. That's just another symptom of how our lives are divided and fragmented. We are all in this together. None of us ever really lives an individual life isolated from others. We are not choosing life or death only for ourselves but for each other, for our neighbors, for our enemies, for the stranger on the street, and the anonymous face across the world.

As Saint Antony, the Great said, ***“Our life and our death are with our neighbor.”*** If we choose life for another, so have we chosen life for ourselves, and if we choose death for another, so have we chosen death for ourselves.

“Whichever he chooses shall be given him.” That’s why this intensification and interiorization of the law are so important and necessary. It is Jesus’ way of saying, ***“Choose life. Choose life. Choose life.”*** If that is what Jesus asks of us, it is only because that is how he and his Father are. They always choose life. They always keep the relationship.

Every time we choose life, every time we keep the relationship, we are participating in the life of God. We are exhibiting divine attributes. We are making God present in this world through our lives and humanity. We can do this together because God first does it with us.

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The next person we meet will set before us a choice between life and death. It may be at lunch, in our family, at work, at school, running our errands, or any one of a thousand other places. Regardless, the choice will be there. Let’s not leave here today, not knowing what we will choose. The choice does not depend on the person or the circumstances. It depends on us. Let’s choose life, let’s keep the relationship. Let’s not stop choosing and keeping so that wherever we go, whomever we are with, whatever we

are doing, there is nothing but life, there is only life, there is nothing but God, there is only God. **Amen.**