

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle A, 2.16.20

Sirach 15:15-20; 1 Corinthians 2:6-10

Matthew 5:17-37

GLOSSING OR FLOSSING?

THE DEEP CLEANING OF GOD'S GRACE

A boy went to confession and his main sin that he wanted to confess was that he had a cavity. He explained to the priest that he was expected to brush his teeth every morning and every evening before going to bed. Twice a day he would go into the bathroom and run his toothbrush under water from the faucet (in case his parents checked it for dampness) and swipe the brush once or twice across his front teeth so he could honestly answer his parents when they inevitably asked that yes, he had brushed his teeth. When his toothache prompted a visit to the dentist which revealed the cavity, the boy admitted that he had not been brushing his teeth very well or at length. He went to confession because his childlike heart was burdened by his deception because though he had never actually lied to his parents, he knew and acknowledged that he had not really done what he knew he was supposed to do or what he'd claimed to have done. He had harmed his relationship with them and with God.



Sometimes people say that they don't need to go to confession because they have not killed anyone or committed

adultery or committed any mortal sins. That is another way of saying that they don't really need God. Sinners go to confession and receive the Eucharist because we need forgiveness and mercy and grace in order to try and become more fully the person God made us to be. While avoiding serious sin is an important part of living a faithful life, there is a lot more to it than that – which is the point of the scriptures today. Little sins can accumulate and multiply and simply cannot be ignored.

St. Francis de Sales:

Many who confess their venial sins out of custom and concern for order but without thought of amendment remain burdened with them for their whole life and thus lose many spiritual benefits and advantages.

People at other times say they don't go to confession because they keep repeating the same litany of recurring minor sins to the priest. Francis de Sales would say that is exactly the reason to go to confession - because in listing our serial sins we acknowledge that we cannot vanquish them on our own, that we need God and God's grace and that we do want to change, we do want to become a different, more faithful person and not allow whatever temptation it is which keeps tripping us up to become the normal way we live our lives or rule our life. Merely avoiding terrible evil is not enough. We must actively be resisting all evil. And we also cannot neglect doing the good things, leave undone, the kind and caring deeds that we have the opportunity to do.

People may sometimes know or have memorized the "what" without any real understanding the "why" or "how" behind a rule or regulation. In today's gospel passage Jesus tries to help his disciples and us understand how adultery is

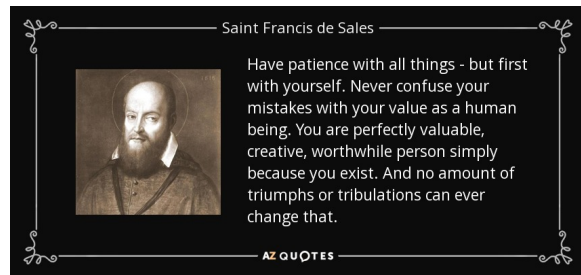
a usually a result of lust or a desire for control or revenge or wanting to disgrace another, how killing is usually preceded by anger or pride or fear or jealousy. How false oaths often proceed from deception or laziness or gluttony. His teaching is a challenge for all of us to do a regular deep cleaning of our hearts for that is what living the Law really means. It is not a few swipes of a brush across our front teeth to fulfill the letter of the law, but regular prolonged brushing and scrubbing and flossing to help promote good spiritual hygiene.

In the gospel passage today, a continuation of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus calls the people to excellence. Jesus did not come to do away with the smallest part of the law, but to fulfill it. Jesus shows us not only the what but the why and the how as well. Jesus calls us to live the Ten Commandments fully.



To live them fully means that we root out from our hearts and lives anything which might eventually lead us to breaking them. Sin begins in our hearts long before we do or say anything evil. And there may be minor sins that we justify to ourselves before we recognize their consequences or commit what we acknowledge to be a serious sin. Jesus calls us to reach deeper, to open our hearts more fully to God, so we might come closer to reaching our potential and living in the Spirit, living in the Kingdom of God.

We might disregard Jesus' teaching in this gospel passage as being impossible. Who could never grow angry, never have a lustful thought, never say the wrong thing or swear an oath? But God does not ask or expect an instantaneous perfection or transformation in us. God ask that we gradually, step by step, with an occasional misstep, grow in grace and wisdom and learn to make better and better choices. And that we choose to make use of the grace God makes available to us through the sacraments and active participation in the Church.



Jesus emptied himself to take on our human flesh so he could demonstrate for us our human potential. Jesus came to show us the way to excellence. Jesus himself suffered all the aches and pains and losses and temptations that are part and parcel of the human condition but in love he went beyond what are our perceived limits to show us the way to live our lives so they are rich in meaning and experiences and colors and beauty and sorrows and eventually find our way to the resurrection and eternal life with God. What Jesus asks seems to be impossible. With God's grace may we strive for Christian excellence and live beyond the bare minimum of the Ten Commandments, living as Jesus lived, loving as Jesus loves and basking in the joy and love of our God. May God be blessed.

Paul Dechant, OSFS