



6th Sunday in Ordinary Time
February 15, 2026
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So our readings today talk to us about freedom, about wisdom, and about the heart of God's law. Our first reading from Sirach begins with a powerful and challenging truth. If you choose, you can keep the commandments. God places before us fire and water, life and death, good and evil. And then he does something amazing.

He lets us choose.

Our faith is not about fate or coercion. God does not force holiness upon us, but he continually gives us opportunities to be holy. But we have to choose to be holy.

There was a movie I watched once, and it starred Morgan Freeman, who played God. And there was this interaction with the woman in a diner who was struggling. And he said to her, "let me ask you something. If someone prays for patience, do you think God gives them patience, or does he give them the opportunity to be patient? If he prays for courage, does God give him courage, or does he give him the opportunity to be courageous? If someone prayed for the family to be closer, do you think God zaps them with warm, fuzzy feelings? Or does he give them opportunities to love each other?"

And that exchange really struck me, because I was, and often still am, among those who just want God to make me patient, courageous, loving, and holy. But God doesn't do that. Rather, he presents us with opportunities, and we have the freedom to choose to be patient, courageous, loving, and holy. Or not.

And that freedom can sometimes be misunderstood. Many people think that freedom means doing whatever I want, whenever I want. But Scripture says otherwise. True freedom is the ability to choose the good. God's commandments are not weights around our neck, but they are directional signs that point us to life.

In today's Gospel, Jesus says something profound. "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish, but to fulfill". You know, at first glance, we might think Jesus is relaxing the rules. I mean, after all, he eats with sinners, he heals on the Sabbath, he challenges the religious leaders.

But here he makes it clear. He is not lowering the bar. He is actually raising the bar. Jesus is trying to move us from external obedience to the law to an interior conversion of the heart. He moves the bar from what we do on the outside to look at the inside into the depths of our heart.

You have heard that it was said, do not kill. But Jesus says, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment. It is not enough, Jesus says, simply not to kill, but we must confront our anger and our contempt.

You have heard that it was said, you shall not commit adultery. But then he says, everyone who looks at a woman with lust, has already committed adultery in his heart. So it is not enough not to commit adultery, but we must guard our desires.

Again, you have heard, it was said to your ancestors, do not take a false oath, but make good to the Lord all that you vow. It is not enough to speak the truth occasionally. Our words must consistently demonstrate integrity, trust and truth.

Anger and lust and dishonesty. These begin internally, and then they work their way out to our actions. If we only focus on avoiding the outward actions, we miss the deeper work that God wants to do in us.



Murder begins with anger and content. Adultery begins with a wandering heart. False oaths begin with a habit of half-truths. Jesus goes to the root of the problem. And here he makes an example of the scribes and Pharisees because they were focused on their outward appearances, following the letter of the law for all to see. But Jesus says, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

That statement must have shocked his listeners. I mean, the Pharisees were the pros at religion. They fasted, they prayed, they tithed. They knew the law inside and out. From outward appearances, they were it. And if their righteousness is not enough, what hope do we have? But Jesus is telling us today that holiness is not just about doing, or not doing, certain actions. It is about the condition of our heart. Jesus doesn't want a checklist. He wants our hearts to be transformed. And this is where it can get uncomfortable.

Because we can hide our external sins. We can appear to be patient while still nursing grudges. We can appear to be faithful while entertaining fantasies. We can appear honest while shading the truth.

But the Lord sees through all of that and looks into our heart. When Jesus says, if your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. He's using strong language here to show us the seriousness of sin. Sin is not harmless. It damages relationships. It hardens hearts, and it separates us from God.

This freedom to choose, this necessary reflection in our hearts can be scary and pretty overwhelming. Because if we truly and honestly examine our actions and our thoughts, our motives and our desires, who here is worthy to stand before the Lord? And that's where St. Paul's words today to the Corinthians become important. He speaks of wisdom, not of this age, a wisdom hidden in God and revealed by the Spirit.

Living a Christian life is not about white, knuckled obedience or moral perfection achieved by our own willpower. It is about opening ourselves up and allowing God's wisdom and God's spirit to reshape our hearts. Jesus is not simply giving us stricter rules. He is inviting us to a deeper love.

The law says do not kill. Love says reconcile quickly with your brother. The law says do not commit adultery. Love says, guard your heart and honor the dignity of others. The law says, do not swear falsely. Love says let your yes mean yes and your no mean no. That is the difference between minimum compliance and wholehearted discipleship. Jesus doesn't just command us to be righteous. He gives us his spirit so that we can become righteous. The same God who gives us the law gives us the grace to live it.

Sirach reminds us that God gives us this freedom to choose. But Jesus shows us what that freedom is for. Not self-will, but love written on the heart. Our gospel from Matthew was part of the Sermon on the Mount. It is not meant to crush us with anxiety and guilt, but to draw us into a deeper relationship with Christ. It's a deeper conversion to move us from what's the least that I have to do to wholehearted love.

And here's the hope. Jesus who raises the bar also gives us the strength of his spirit. He doesn't call us to this deeper holiness and then leave us alone. He walks with us. He forgives us. He feeds us. These readings today invite us to examine our lives honestly from the inside out. And maybe we need to ask ourselves, when God places before us opportunities to be patient, courageous, loving, and holy, are we choosing wisely? Do we sometimes settle for doing the least amount instead of striving for complete holiness? Do we outwardly appear to obey while avoiding or resisting internal change?

We come before the Lord in this Eucharistic celebration not as people who have perfectly fulfilled the law, but as sinners who desire to love God with an undivided heart. Let us ask God for the wisdom that comes from the Spirit, that in our freedom to choose, we may choose wisely so that we may choose good over evil, life over death, not by our strength alone, but by trusting God who writes his law upon our hearts and gives us His Spirit and the grace to live it. If you choose, you can keep the commandments. They will save you. If you trust in God, you too shall live.