

Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time – February 11-12, 2023

The last two Sunday we have been hearing Jesus' teaching taken from his Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's gospel. We first heard Jesus' proclamation of the Beatitudes – a way of living that is radically different from the way of life that is often encouraged by the world. And yet, this way of life -- living humbly, being merciful, hungering for justice, a willingness to suffer insults for the sake of the gospel, etc – is simply the way of life that Jesus himself lived throughout his life on earth and the way we will seek to live if we are his disciples.

Then last weekend, we heard Jesus tell us how important it is to the world that we live in the manner of the Beatitudes. Jesus told his disciples and us that when we live our lives in witness to the ways of the Beatitudes we are the light and the salt of the world. Seeking to live our lives in the manner of the Beatitudes is the way that the kingdom God will be come to be on earth.

Today we hear even more about what a blessing and treasure the laws of God are for all of humanity. In today's gospel, Jesus tells us that he has come not to abolish the Old Law, but to bring it to fulfillment. He perfects and raises it to a higher order. Through their fulfillment in Jesus, the laws and truths that we have from God are of eternal value to the people of all times. The truth of faith does not change with the passage of time. The Creed does not change. It does not get out of date. Though there may be new insights and new ways restating the doctrine of faith in the language of each age, there is no deviation from the basic teachings that we have received from Christ, and the Church is responsible for preserving and transmitting until the end of time these truths she has received from Christ.

What a joy it is to see how many are trying to learn more about the truths of our faith through the on-line Catechism in a Year program that began this year.

To keep the truths of faith in their fulness is essential to the salvation of mankind. What truth is there other than the truth of Christ? The Creed is our solid pillar of support and we

cannot give way even in small ways as Jesus warns in today's gospel.

At times we may be inclined to compromise. As one author, St. Jose Escriva, writes: "You are afraid of hurting people, of creating division and of giving the appearance of being intolerant and you are giving in on certain positions and certain points (though you assure me they are not serious ones) which will have serious consequences for many." -- Then he goes on: "Forgive my sincerity: through your behavior, you are falling into nothing less than the stupid and harmful intolerance that you were concerned to avoid: that of not allowing the truth to be proclaimed." -- Proclaiming the truth is often the greatest good we can do for those who surround us.

We see this in Jesus' words to the scribes and Pharisees. They looked as if they were perfect in their behavior. They observed the letter of the law to a T. But Jesus could see deep into their hearts and saw that their concern for perfection was only for show. It is not enough to observe every commandment outwardly. We need to change our attitudes so that we truly internalize God's law. In the sacrament of confession I often encourage people to look more deeply at their attitudes as well as their actions. Later on Jesus will teach us that simply the love of God and love of neighbor are the greatest commandments and that if we have this love in our hearts toward our brothers and sisters we will live our lives in accordance with the heart of the commandments.

Ultimately, though it is our choice. There is a lot of talk these days about having the freedom to choose and about fighting for our liberties. But the free will that God has given us and gave his life to preserve in us is the freedom to be able to choose the right thing and not a license to do whatever we please. God is not responsible for our sin, sin comes from our human choice alone. Human freedom is part of God's will and being in the likeness of God, and God wills not to rid the world of the possibility of sin, because to do so would be to remove the gift of freedom. Rather -- following in humility and obedience the commandments prevents one from making the choice to sin.

We need to realize more clearly that it is we who choose how we will act, but we don't always see that because we are letting ourselves be governed not so much by conscious choice but by our feelings and our ideas. We think we have done the best we could – but have actually and consciously always thought through our choices and their consequences?

In summary, Jesus is teaching us a new way of observing the commandments. He is calling us to choose to keep the commandments because they can save us as the first reading says. Life in Christ means that our whole being needs transformation, starting within the very depths of our hearts.

Again, the truths of faith that we have received are a great blessing. As one person put it: “When we accept the Faith which the Church proposes to us, we communicate directly with the Apostles . . . and through them we communicate with Christ , our first and only Teacher. We go their school as it were, crossing all time that separates us. Thanks to the teaching office of the Church, the Magisterium, we can say in a way that the whole world has received Christ's teaching and has been brought to Galilee. All humanity is able to stand on the shores of the sea of Galilee and receive the truths of Jesus' teaching.

In today's psalm we prayed – “Blessed are they who follow the law of the Lord.” In today's Mass we lift up our thanks to God / especially for the blessings and wonders of God's law.