



February 15, 2026

## Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time

*"...unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven" Matthew 5:20*

Dear Friends,

Years ago, I went into the eighth-grade classroom of the Catholic school in the parish I served. I noticed a sign that in bold lettering proclaimed, *"Christianity is a relationship."* As Jesus continues his Sermon on the Mount, he reminds us of the demands of our membership in Christ.

Two Sundays ago, Jesus redefined truly blessed or honorable behavior in the Beatitudes. Today announces the theme of his sermon, the righteousness of his followers. Righteousness means proper and honorable relationships with other people in the community of faith whom we call brothers and sisters.

The scribes were the specialists in the Law (Torah) and its observance. The Law was summed up in the ten commandments. The purpose of the commandments was to regulate behavior between and among the Israelites. The idea was to minimize the possible destruction of Israel as a result of the honor-driven blood feuds. In an honor-based society, murder, theft (which includes adultery) lying and so on require retaliation.

Jesus takes aim at the scribes by reinterpreting the commandments. He wants to offer his followers an honorable way out of situations that could lead to feuds and death. For Jesus, squelching the feud even takes precedence over Temple worship! Jesus wanted to reshape the laws governing relationships to make them more humane.

I believe the biggest challenge to Christian faith in modern America is the idea that we do not need relationships, every person is on their own. This modern attitude is rooted in white evangelical theology. It is called *"self-authenticated personal salvation."* This is a subjective approach where the individual validates their own spiritual standing, authenticity, or identity focusing on internal feelings, personal experiences, or self-actualization rather than any external relationship with a faith community. I can justify any behavior as long as I attribute it to my personal inner voice which is the only thing I heed.

This approach fails to consider that we are limited by our humanity and sin. No one person can be the ultimate judge of their own spiritual authenticity. When personal feelings are placed over any other truth, this becomes a false gospel that replaces reliance on God's grace and the support of a faith community. This modern, individualized salvation leads to an encapsulated self that is cut off from others. If salvation is authenticated only through feelings, doubt or the absence of that validating feeling can lead to unspeakable misery.

Also this approach is the opposite of scripture. In the Hebrew Testament God through his servant Moses gathers a disparate group and forms them into a people. God tells them, *"I will take you as my own people, and you shall have me as your God"* (Exodus 6:7) He gives this people the Law to help them live this new relationship as people of the Covenant. The Law is our tutor in righteous living with one another.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus is presented as the new Moses who gathers the scattered people of God together. He tells us that anything that disrupts the right relationships among the community are to be avoided. The observance of the law must go deeper than mere external performance. He calls us to interior conversion that seeks always to live in harmony with the community of faith. In that we will be truly esteemed by God.

Peace,

*Fr Ron*

*Esta carta está en español en el sitio web: [www.anne.church](http://www.anne.church)*